**The Exhibitionist Next Door**

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**The Exhibitionist Next Door - 120: Taking Dale Home**

“Deputy Alvarez, Where is the bathroom?” asked Dale.  
  
Surprise and shock surged though Dale as she initially confronted an idea that only moments before had been completely unimaginable to her, that it had all been a grand and complex set-up. But her need to pee was so intense, that she had to focus on first things first.  
  
As Deputy Alvarez guided her to a room down the hall, Dale was pummeled by various emotions. The initial shock and surprise did not give way to feelings of relief, as she might have anticipated. Instead, anger boiled up within her, as well as feelings of profound betrayal. She had felt so much in love and ‘as one’ with Nate just moments before, but suddenly she felt all alone…so very alone! The image of him, just now, standing right next to ‘that woman’, while she held on to his arm, were seared into her brain.  
  
The feelings of pain, hurt, and betrayal of trust that she was experiencing, as she entered the bathroom, to her surprise, were much harder on her psyche than the emotions that she had been dealing with back when she had believed that the ‘traffic stop gone bad’ was a real issue. That had been serious, yet something that they could overcome together, as a team, because they had each other.  
  
The shock had begun a transformation. The girl who would emerge from the bathroom was destined to be a battle hardened warrior. Someone much less willing to drop her guard and trust, than she had ever been in her life.  
  
“Well,” said Nate while she was in the restroom. “I always planned to tell her. I know that you thought that we wouldn’t have to, Kelly. The county could just drop all charges. But I did want her to know the truth. This just isn’t how I expected to tell her, but maybe one way is as good as another.  
  
When Dale came out of the restroom, her eyes were still red, but now they had a different look to them. There seemed to be fire within, and determination. She had clearly washed away the tears, and with them any hint of frailness or insecurity that might have been evident as she had been confronting the deputies in the station that evening.  
  
She addressed Kelly resolutely, “So, Sheriff Kelly, am I free to go?”  
  
“Yes, you may go,” said Kelly. “There is the bonfire at our house, but I fully understand if you don’t choose to come tonight.”  
  
Dale continued, “Nate, where is the car?”  
  
“It’s here somewhere, but I think Deputy Petersen has the key,” said Nate.  
  
Dale took off the blanket, handing it to Deputy Alvarez, she said, “I won’t be needing this any longer.”  
  
It was clear to everyone that Dale had taken charge.  
  
“Nate, get the key. Drive me home! I’ve had quite enough for one evening.”  
  
She headed up the stairs, dressed again only in her tennis shoe outfit. Nate shrugged to everyone sheepishly, and headed up the stairs after her.  
  
Once they had the key, Dale walked boldly out the front door. It was hardly late, but the county seat was one of those small towns were they roll up the sidewalks early, even on a Friday night. A few people did notice the nude girl walk out of the courthouse and head down the street, climbing into an older model sedan.  
  
Once they were headed out of town, Nate tried talking to her. She just stared out the window. Her expression remained blank, and she never replied, no matter what he said.  
  
He was reminded of the time in the car after the visit to her sister’s. That time she had also been unwilling to discuss what had happened, only then, she had been sobbing. This time she was not sobbing. Somehow that made it all seem much worse. He could tell that she was probably madder than he had ever seen her. But at least, she was a captive audience. He knew that even if she didn’t talk, that she couldn’t help but hear what he said. So he did his best to explain his reasoning, and to apologize if he had again misjudged.  
  
At the diner, he held out a quarter, offering it to her. She indicated that he needed to get the clothes himself, with a most scathing look. He couldn’t get that look out of his mind. It had been so utterly devoid of anything aproaching warmth. Nate was very glad that the clothes were exactly where he had put them.  
  
Dale dressed in the car, without uttering a word. When he parked in front of his house, she got out and went inside. Without a glance in his direction. Without a word.

**The Exhibitionist Next Door - 121: Feeling Alone**

Nate woke up feeling more alone in the world than he had in a long time. The way his conversation had ended with Dale the night before – silence – left him wondering how it would start back up, even if it would start back up.  
  
He was even wondering if the traffic stop ruse would end up being the mistake of a lifetime. He had taken big chances before, and they had always ended up working out. He had come to believe that Dale had a nearly insatiable need for risk. And he had always been impressed with her resilience. She either took things in stride as they were happening, or if not, then she got over things quickly.  
  
He thought about the bungee jump instance. He had taken a huge risk doing that to the Homecoming Queen. She hadn’t warmed up to the idea very quickly as they were meeting Frank. But in the end she had loved it. After jumping she had wanted to go again, and she had even wanted to go back to the dance nude.  
  
He had even had to talk her out of that. That would have turned out much worse for her than the traffic stop ruse. And when the photos started showing up at school, she had even taken that in stride. And getting pantsed, she had managed to take that in stride. And even getting talked to by the principal, she had even found a silver lining in that.  
  
So why did she seem so bothered by this? It didn’t make sense to him. He had tried to explain how controlled it had been. She had gotten to have an experience that she had wondered out loud if she would find thrilling. And there had been no real risk. The whole time she had been in the hands of people who had her interests at heart. Of course, she hadn’t known it at the time, but it was true.  
  
Once she was in the hands of Deputy Petersen and Deputy Alvarez, there had been no other authority to come along and arrest her. Her level of safety had been so high the whole time. He didn’t know why he had been unable to get her to see it that way on the drive home. He thought that she must have been feeling very deceived. Her silence had left him baffled as to what she was actually thinking. Always he had paid attention to her reaction in order to get better at the craft of finding new and exciting places for her to be nude, and tailoring experiences to fit what seemed to work for her.  
  
He loved Dale, and he loved being with her, but when he was honest with himself, there was an aspect of it that he had become seriously addicted to. He was very far into the relationship before he realized this about himself. Some guys like taking their girlfriends to dinner. Some guys like taking them to movies. But Nate had learned that he really liked surprising Dale, he loved scaring the shit out of her. He had become addicted to putting her through an emotional wringer.  
  
Early on, he had always told himself that he was doing it all for her. That what he was doing wasn’t for him, and it wasn’t a component of his personality. That he was forcing himself to do it for her. And then one day he had had an epiphany. He realized that he enjoyed it.  
  
He had loved hearing her say, “I don’t want to meet Frank.” He had loved her reaction when he showed her off to the guys in the drive through. And he had loved it when she had attempted to hide on the floorboards of his car, just the night before. He could list so many instances. He had even loved it when she had thrown her lemonade in his face at her sister’s, and he had loved it when she had run up the trail trying desparately to find a way to avoid meeting Carly and Felipe while nude.  
  
He loved it when she had no possible avenue of escape, exactly like that time on the trail to Windy Ridge. And it was all so easy to justify because it was HER craving. One time she had even called nudity, her ‘hobby’. But over time he had learned that he too was pursuing a hobby. And his hobby was essentially abusing her by catering to her kink too obsessively, abusing her via spoiling her, overindulging her in her 'hobby'.  
  
He had discovered how much enjoyment for him there was in that. Had it been real ‘abuse’ then he was sure he never would have done it. Indeed, he would never treat any other girl that way. He did it to her because she loved it. But also true was the fact that he had come to love doing it to her.  
  
But it wasn’t really his fault. She had trained him to cater to her kink so obsessively. So how could it be fair that she was upset at him for giving her what she craved? It was all so confusing, and seemingly so unfair.  
  
But what he really couldn’t figure out, in retrospect, is why he had taken the gamble. Indeed, hindsight is 20/20. His relationship with Dale was by far the best thing that had ever happened to him. How could he have gambled with that? He could explain it, but it still made no sense to him now as he thought back over the choices that he had made leading up to the event.  
  
It had started the first weekend, the gambling that is. He had realized early that his one Ace was his ability to feed her craving, and he had vowed to not lose his shot at the girl of his dreams, simply because he wasn’t willing to play his one card, his Ace. And, like many gamblers, he had never pushed back from the table.  
  
Every card player knows that after winning a few hands – a few big pots – that they should take their winnings and go home. Once he had landed the girl, he should have stopped taking chances, or at least stopped taking big chances. But gamblers don’t seem to be able to push back, no matter how ‘up’ they are. Similarly he had not been able to stop taking risks. He now saw that he had a gambling problem, and it now might end up costing him the girl.  
  
Was he guilty too of simply taking her words at face value, without a comprehensive understanding of the complexities of the female brain? Indeed, Dale was a young woman. Possibly still a work in progress, evolving, and also still becoming acquainted with her own desires, urges and emotions. On many occasions, he had thought that he had an adequate understanding of Dale to proceed with something risky, only to encounter a mishap, reminding him of how much he still had to learn.  
  
Well, now it was time for him to go to work at rebuilding the relationship. But this time it didn’t seem like he had an Ace anymore. He didn’t feel like he had any cards, at all, to play. Yet he was sure he could somehow win her back, or so he hoped. Hadn’t they just confessed their love to one another? Surely love would see them through, right?  
  
Time to start! He sent her a text that read simply, “Good Morning!”  
  
She didn’t respond immediately, so he forced himself to be constructive. He sat down at the dining room table with his math. He didn’t want to do his homework, but somehow it was better than just staring at his phone, focusing on how she was not responding. And he knew that she did not live and die by her phone, like so many their age. Sometimes she simply did not have it with her. When she was nude, she didn’t have it with her, but other times as well.  
  
He managed to keep himself from sending her other texts. He didn’t want to come across as needy. At 11:00 am he decided to go next door and try to talk with her. He knocked, but it was Mrs. Jordan who answered the door. “Oh, Hi, Nate!” she said very cheerfully.  
  
“Hello Mrs. Jordan, is Dale around?” asked Nate.  
  
“Actually, she got up and left fairly early this morning,” said Mrs. Jordan. “She said she was going over to visit her aunt, Todd’s sister. Those two have always gotten along so well. Have you met her, Nate?”  
  
“Actually I have,” said Nate, “but only recently. Dale introduced me to her at the mall.”  
  
“Oh yes, I run into her there myself,” said Mrs. Jordan.  
  
“Okay, please tell her that I dropped over to say ‘hi’ when she comes home,” said Nate.  
  
“Absolutely, young man!” said Mrs. Jordan.  
  
As Nate walked away, he realized that Dale had not told her mother anything about what had happened the night before, or relationship trauma. That, at least, was encouraging. He had been noticing that Dale’s parents were sending off the most positive vibes imaginable. It was as if they were going out of their way to make him feel welcome, anytime he was around.  
  
That afternoon, he broke down and sent her one more text. As it turned out, Dale did not come home all day. Eventually Nate had to leave to go and suit up for the football game. He expected that she’d be there, but he was not sure that she’d talk to him.  
  
As it turned out, that is exactly how it went. There was Dale, and by all outward appearances, she was the same old Dale. But unfortunately, she was the same old ‘pre-rooftop-rescue’ Dale. It was again as if he did not exist. She managed to see past him, without ever seeing him. She never even made eye contact with him.  
  
He tried to play his best, but his heart was not in it. Felipe, right next to him on the line, noticed his despondency, but no one else seemed to. In the end, they won the game handily, but not due to his effort. Felipe knew a little about what was going on from talking to Carly, but Nate wasn’t really in the mood to share his woes.  
  
When he came out of the locker room, Dale was nowhere to be seen. So he simply headed home. The Jordan house was dark when he got home, so he was fairly certain that she was not home.  
  
He started thinking, maybe I forced her to confront her biggest fear, getting caught. Possibly she has just decided to give me a harsh experience in exchange. Maybe she is making me face my biggest hear, losing her. Hopefully that is all that this is. Maybe she is just trying to turn the tables on me, so that I learn what it feels like. He hoped that that was what she was doing.  
  
A few minutes after walking in the door, he got a text. To his surprise it was from Dale. He was so glad that she had broken the day long silence. Her text read, “Can you meet me at the flagpole in an hour?”  
  
The thing that struck him about her text was her use of the word ‘the’ in place of the word ‘my’. She had obviously written it that way intentionally.  
  
He sent her a text reply that read, “OK.” But no sooner had he had hit ‘send’, than he had found himself having second thoughts. She had ignored his texts all day, so why had he answered so quickly, and so agreeably.  
  
He decided to go looking for Felipe, who he knew had spoken with Carly. He realized that he should have pressed him for more information when it had come up earlier.  
  
Felipe was home. After saying hello to his parents, Mr. And Mrs. Fuentes, Nate headed down to the basement to find Felipe. Felipe was there and they started a game of pool.  
  
Felipe had indeed been talking to Carly, even since the game. From him, he learned that Dale had been at Aunt Mary’s the whole day, which he had known already. Carly had been there as well. Dale was obviously using them as a support group, probably she had spent the day telling them how mad she was at him, and how severely he had mistreated her. In reality, he could only guess what they might have talked about.  
  
When he finally asked Felipe point blank if he knew about why he was supposed to go meet Dale at the flagpole, he got a shockingly blunt answer, “She’s going to break up with you, dude.” Felipe even knew that Carly was going to drive her and stand by for moral support.

**The Exhibitionist Next Door - 122: The Inevitable**

Nate took a deep breath. He couldn’t believe that it had come to this. And as he considered things, he found himself wishing he had not answered her text so quickly. Indeed he should have treated her just as she was treating him. Two can play this game, right? He knew that it might not be the most mature thing to do, but he decided to stand her up. But why not? Breaking up over one incident, was hardly a sign of maturity either.  
  
He continued to play pool with Felipe, and tried to forget about things. In part, he consoled himself by thinking, ‘She just needs more time to get over it. Denying her the opportunity to actually go through with a breakup might keep it from happening, because it would give her more time to think.’  
  
As the time of the proposed meeting came and went, he thought he might get a, “Where are you?” text from her. He didn’t. Finally, after it had gotten quite late, he went home and went to bed.  
  
The next day was Sunday. He had decided to not send any texts. She needed to see how it felt to be ignored! Mid-morning he got a text from her that read, “Missed you last night. What happened?” He stuck to his guns and didn’t respond. A half hour later he got a longer text. It read, “Since you denied me the opportunity to do this politely and in person, you leave me no choice. So Nate, it’s over. Consider us broken up.”  
  
Nate had never been one to cry, and he didn’t cry now, but this hurt. It hurt so very bad! His insides felt awful, and there was no one he could tell, and there was nothing he could do that might make him feel better.  
  
He thought about texting her, or calling her, or trying to go and see her. Instead he decided to stick by his decision. He stayed inside, suffering alone. He wondered what she was going through, but in the end he decided that he was too proud to make any attempt to find out.  
  
That evening, he got another text from Dale. It read simply, “Fight Song.”  
  
He instantly understood the reference, bringing up YouTube, he typed in ‘Fight Song’. He clicked on the Rachel Platten video. He knew the song well, indeed he knew that Dale liked it, but he had never watched the video.  
  
The chorus penetrated into his very soul as he listened:  
  
This is my fight song  
Take back my life song  
Prove I'm alright song  
My power's turned on  
Starting right now I'll be strong  
I'll play my fight song  
And I don't really care if nobody else believes  
'Cause I've still got a lot of fight left in me  
  
Dale was clearly trying to give him a hint, at hint at where she was mentally, emotionally. It struck him as an anthem of independence, and he finally broke down and cried. It hurt so very bad, but in a way, it felt good to finally allow the emotions to wash though, and let the tears flow.  
  
Part of why it hurt, was the image of Rachel Platten herself. She didn’t look exactly like Dale, but there certainly was some resemblance, especially her hair. Her shoulder length blond hair definitely reminded him of Dale, all the way down to how it looked somewhat unruly. That was how Dale often looked, because she didn’t spend the time to keep it looking all in place.  
  
He forced himself to watch the video several times, each time trying to put himself in Dale’s shoes. Trying to get a feel for what she was feeling, what was going on inside her head, what she was going through. Doing so reminded him of how important it was to be in touch with what Dale was thinking, now more than ever.  
  
Can you hear my voice this time?  
  
This is my fight song  
Take back my life song  
Prove I'm alright song  
My power's turned on  
Starting right now I'll be strong  
  
Rachel’s words of strong independence reverberated through him until it felt as if Dale were telling him that she herself was taking back her life, kicking him out. That she had resloved to be strong and prove to him that she was going to be alright…without him.  
  
And the emotions that he saw on Rachel’s face as she belted out that chorus, well, it made him picture Dale. And he pictured the emotions that she must be experiencing. He kicked himself for his lack of foresight, but it was too late to turn back the clock.  
  
And I don't really care if nobody else believes  
'Cause I've still got a lot of fight left in me  
  
So many lines in the song might speak to her, but he felt that it was probably the chorus, mostly, that was speaking to her in the current situation.  
  
He shut off the sound, and watched. He decided that Rachel looked more like Dale than just her hair. He laughed when he figured out why he had not initially thought so. She was wearing tops with low, warm weather necklines. Had she been dressed more conservatively she might look more like Dale. And entirely nude, she might look more like Dale. But dressed as she was, the resemblance was a bit more distant.  
  
After giving it considerable thought, he decided to send Dale a short text, so that she would know that he was listening, paying attention. He sent, “Ouch…but thanks.”  
  
There was no reply.  
  
He decided on one more text, “Dale, I still love you.”  
Again there was no reply. He still felt that it had been the right thing to do. It was time to go back to being his more mature self.  
  
He wondered what Monday would be like. He couldn’t believe how time seemed to have slowed down. He didn’t really like Mondays, but this one seemed as if it would never come. But eventually he found himself walking into Spanish at his usual time, just before the bell.  
  
He noticed that Dale was seated in her ‘old’ usual place in the front row. It made him sad, but he had prepared himself for it. Just like the evening of the game, it was as if the past few months had never happened. He had his original relationship with the neighbor girl back.  
  
Kenny looked at him inquisitively, but he just shrugged. What was there to say?  
  
He noted that Dale seemed to go to extra effort to not turn around. Given the conversational nature of the class, it was actually strange that she never turned around, not even once.  
  
Nate didn’t know how to deal with a brief encounter at the end of class, so when the bell rang, he shot out the door. If she was avoiding looking at him, then two could play that game, he thought.  
  
And so the pattern was established, a pattern that stuck. For Nate each day passed very slowly and painfully. Each day, Spanish was as close as they came to one another. He would come in, after she was seated. She never turned around, and he would bolt as soon as the bell rang.  
  
By Wednesday, the rumor had spread about their breakup. He had expected it to happen earlier. Surely Dale had not used the Jodie method. Jodie must know and be spreading the rumor by now, but she must not have had the advantage of early notification.  
  
On Wednesday afternoon, he had people asking him for confirmation, and asking him for the details. He tried to get away with not saying much, but he knew that the little he did say served as confirmation. The nature of the questions shifted as the news of the Dale-Nate breakup became widely known.  
  
He mostly didn’t get questions or comments from girls, but Carly did go out of her way to call him a ‘shithead’ to his face. She took off before he had a chance to respond. He had been hoping to talk to her, but now that her attitude was clear, he didn’t really care.  
  
Guys were a different matter altogether. They mostly wanted to continue what Jason had started. In other words, they wanted to know if ‘she put out’. A typical question went something like, “So Nate, did you break up because she wouldn’t ‘put out’?”  
  
His typical answer went something like, “That hardly matters. She is an exceptional person, and my life is richer for the time I had the privilege of spending at her side.” Nobody seemed interested in such a diplomatic response. They just wanted to know if she ‘put out’.  
  
On Thursday, he was sitting in the lunch room. It had mostly cleared out as fifth period was just minutes away. Suddenly he felt someone sit down next to him on the bench. So close, in fact, that they were touching at the hip. It was Dale. His legs were under the table, and she was facing the other way, away from the table. Their eyes met. Finally, she said, “Hi Nate.” It was the first words he had heard from her since the Sheriff’s office.  
  
He didn’t know what to say. He had so much he wanted to say, and yet nothing that he wanted to say. He said nothing. After the pause had grown uncomfortably long, she continued, “Would it surprise you if I told you that my spies are telling me what you are saying about me?”  
  
Nate studied her face, her eyes, her smile as she spoke. He knew her so well, that little details stood out to him. He could tell that she was working at acting calm and collected, mostly succeeding, yet he knew that it was how she was trying to come across. She was more nervous than she wanted him to think. And, as he looked into her eyes, he could tell that there was some redness there.  
  
“I guess not, you have a pretty good system in place,” said Nate.  
  
“I do, and you are such a gentleman. You have always been such a gentleman,” said Dale.  
  
“Dale, what is your point?” asked Nate. He was not in the mood to let her off easy. At some point, she was going to have to let her guard down, and stop pretending to be so calm, so collected and so uncaring. The lunchroom was hardly the ideal place, but it had to happen sometime. Why not the lunchroom?  
  
“Please don’t get upset with me!” said Dale.  
  
“Dale, I love you. I’ve missed you so much this week. I know I made a big mistake, but I…I…I have to get to class,” said Nate.  
  
“Okay. Can we talk sometime Nate?” asked Dale.  
  
“Sure, if you really want to talk. But if you just want to act nice and try to make this breakup seem friendly, then forget it,” said Nate harshly, walking off to class.  
  
He couldn’t believe that he had just treated her that way, especially given how much he was glad that she had finally broken the ice. And yet it had happened, so he kept going. He didn’t look back. If he had, he would have seen her start crying. She ended up missing her fifth period English class, crying in a bathroom.  
  
He wouldn’t have known about that at all, but for Susie Chandler. Susie was one of the many cheerleaders that he had watched from a distance, never speaking with. Interestingly, she had been smiling at him and even saying ‘hi’ to him from time to time lately. Unlike many of the other cheerleaders, she seemed quite down to earth.  
  
Out of the blue that afternoon, she had come up to him and mentioned that Dale had been crying in the bathroom during fifth period. She had only brought it up out of her concern for Dale and what she was going through, saying that she too had missed class trying to comfort her. She thought that it would be good if he knew, for she could tell the depth of Dale’s distress.

**The Exhibitionist Next Door - 123: Carly's Lifeline**

Nate thought about calling Dale or visiting her that evening. Unbeknownst to him, she was home, also thinking about calling, texting, or knocking on his door.  
  
The next day was Friday, one week since the fateful traffic stop. It was a game day, meaning that there was a mid-morning pep rally. Nate finally got to see Dale’s Maverick mount and dismount during a cheer routine, the very stunts he had watched her practice the week before, way back when they had still been a couple.  
  
First, the Maverick was wheeled into position in the middle of the gym by the chosen pallbearers. The pallbearers were a group of four athletes who had been selected for the honor by the coach. During football season, they were football players; during basketball season they were basketball players. They would usually be the same players all season, which made sense. The Maverick would only be brought into the gym for assemblies about four times during the season, so being a pallbearer was an honor, yet represented a duty that rarely came into play.  
  
The pallbearers were literally elite football players, two chosen from offense: Quarterback, Ward Kerner, and, Jason Hooper, the Fullback, Dale’s Ex. The defensive players were: Cody Horton, Linebacker, and Gage Webb, Safety.  
  
Nate had gotten to know both Cody and Gage very well during the season. Cody, being Middle Linebacker, was essentially the Quarterback of the defense unit, the one calling the formations before each play. Gage was incredibly fast, always where he needed to be when all else failed. He was a sprinter during track season, and had tied the school record in the 100 meter dash his junior year. He also happened to be something quite rare in Prospect, an African American. Prospect, indeed the whole state, was not a place to which many African American families had resettled, as the West opened up.  
  
Nate had always thought that the morbid term ‘pallbearers’ was inappropriate for something so revered as the schools physical manifestation of their mascot, yet that is what everyone called them. As far as he knew, the term was generations old.  
  
After the Maverick was in position, the pallbearers took their seats with the rest of the team. The marching band performed next. Then came the cheerleaders. He knew Dale’s time on the Maverick’s back was at hand once he saw her standing on Kendra’s shoulders. Her round off mount was flawless.  
  
He had known that she would be doing a cheer along with the other cheerleaders while up there, but she stayed on the Maverick for longer than he had been expecting. At one point, he noted that all the cheerleaders were in standing split positions, and he remembered something that Dale had told him long ago.  
  
Dale was in the Needle position, but all the other girls were in the Scorpion position. What he remembered her saying, was that she was the only one on the squad who could do the Needle, and that it was something that Jodie was jealous about. That was indeed what he was seeing. Dale in the needle position, the other girls in scorpion positions.  
  
Nate looked to see if she would make eye contact with him, as she had promised to do way back at their first campfire. She did not. It was a sad moment for him, and he wondered if it had even crossed her mind to look for him while in that position.  
  
Her layout back flip dismount wasn’t quite flawless, but few would have noticed. He knew that she wanted to stick the landing, but she did have to step back a very small amount with one foot. That small detail was completely lost to everyone else he was sure. It fit in seamlessly with the continuing cheer. On the plus side, she had achieved an amazing amount of height.  
  
As he watched her perform the short routine with the school’s mascot, the magnitude of his loss was overwhelming to him. He had always viewed her as the ideal teen girl, head and shoulders above the other cheerleaders, who were in their own right all young ladies perfectly tailored for wet dreams.  
  
Yet now that he had gotten to know Dale, he knew that she was so much more than he could have imagined back before their amazing summer. Previously he had worshipped her from afar based mostly on her physical beauty, her poise, and how she was genuinely kind to everyone, irrespective of social standing. Now he knew her other facets, all adding up to an amazingly well-rounded individual of tremendous depth.  
  
After school, there was, of course, no football practice. Nate had just gotten home when he received a text from Carly. It read, “Can you meet me at the f---ing flagpole?” He thought about ignoring her. He was not in the mood to be called names by Carly. In the end he decided that it was a risk that he had to take. He sent her a quick text saying that he was heading back to school to talk with her.  
  
After parking, he found Carly alone, nose buried in her phone while she waited. As he walked up, she saw him and said, “What is it about this f---ing flagpole?”  
  
“What do you mean?” asked Nate.  
  
“Dale has been blubberin’ all week. Most of what she says makes so little sense, but especially the flagpole parts. And she picked it for the site of the big breakup. The one that you didn’t have the courtesy to attend, shithead.”  
  
“Okay, Carly, cut to the chase. Why am I here? If you’re just going to call me a ‘shithead’ and kick me in the balls, let’s get it over with so I can go home,” said Nate. “I’ve got a football game in a few hours.”  
  
“Shut up and sit down. I’m meeting with you for a reason. I do think you are a shithead. But you are Dale’s shithead, so I’m talking to you because I have no other shitheads to pick from,” said Carly.  
  
“Okay, I’m sitting,” said Nate with a sarcastic tone of voice.  
  
“Wow, you sound like a professional shithead,” said Carly.  
  
“Okay, now I’m leaving,” said Nate, getting back on his feet.  
  
“Sit back down and hear me out!” said Carly.  
  
“I’m listening, but time’s almost up,” said Nate.  
  
“Ok, here’s the deal. I’m going to try and help get you and Dale back together, but if I do, I want it to be crystal clear that I still think you are a shithead,” said Carly.  
  
“Well, if anything is clear, it is that. You’ve only called me that a dozen times in the last minute. But this makes no sense. If you think I am such a shithead, why would you try and get us back together?” asked Nate.  
  
“You should see her, Nate. She might look somewhat normal here at school, but she’s a wreck. She is spending every evening at my house, or at Mary’s. She tries to study, but it is really hard to study when all you can do is cry,” said Carly. “She has been so unbelievably happy this fall. I’ve known her forever, and this fall was the first time that she has ever seemed truly happy. Whatever you did, you messed up big time!”  
  
“She didn’t tell you?” asked Nate.  
  
“Oh, she told me plenty. She told me more than I wanted to hear. I’ve heard enough Naked Dale stories to last me a lifetime, but she skipped over parts, surely trying to spare my sensitive ears. I’m sure Mary got the full play-by-play account. I still can’t believe that Mary knew all about this for years, and Dale never bothered to tell me,” said Carly.  
  
“And I’ve known for years. I guess you’re just the last to find out, aren’t you,” said Nate.  
  
“Wow, you really are a shithead!” said Carly.  
  
Suddenly Nate realized how stupid he was being. Carly was probably the only one who could help, and she was throwing him a lifeline. It was really stupid of him to insult her.  
  
“I’m sorry, Carly. I do appreciate that you want to talk. Do you have a plan? If so, I’m all ears. I’ve felt like the luckiest guy on the planet all fall, but suddenly my world is in tatters,” said Nate.  
  
“Finally you are starting to get a little sense…into that…head of yours” said Carly. “Are you ready to hear my idea?”  
  
“Please,” said Nate.  
  
“First off, I don’t really have any great ideas. You and Dale are going to have to mostly do this on your own. All I think I can do is to get you two together. I’m hoping that Dale will soften up,” said Carly. “So my plan is nothing more than a double date. I’ve already proposed the idea to her, and she refused, so I am thinking of tricking her.”  
  
“Tricking her?” asked Nate.  
  
“Fortunately there is a movie coming out this weekend that she really wants to see. It should be easy to talk her into going to it with me. You and Felipe can just happen to go to the same movie. I don’t want her to know that it is a set-up. But she might figure it out, just as she figured everything out when we conspired to ambush her on the trail to the lookout. I know you’ve been involved in so many set-ups. What’s one more, right?” said Carly. “The movie will be popular, but if we arrive early, there should be open seats. You guys can find us in the theater, and act surprised. You can sit by Dale, and Felipe can sit by me,” said Carly.  
  
“And if she tries to storm out?” asked Nate.  
  
“Well, she does want to see the movie, but if she leaves, then you can follow her. She won’t have a car, so you guys will have a chance to talk. Even if she starts walking home, you can walk with her,” said Carly. “And if things are going well, we’ll all go back to my house and we can order pizza. Sound good?”  
  
“Thanks Carly. I’m game to try it, but even if we have a chance to talk, I’m not sure it will make any difference. She’s heard what I have to say, and she seems to have made up her mind.”  
  
“But have you heard what she has to say?” asked Carly.  
  
“I have not! But that is not my fault. She’s not talking,” said Nate.  
  
“Well, I think she might talk now. At least give it a chance,” said Carly.  
  
The football game that evening was essentially a repeat of the game the prior weekend. However, Dale did seem to look at him and smile at one point. He knew he might have been mistaken; it was so brief.  
  
Saturday evening eventually rolled around, and Nate and Felipe walked into the movie theater at the agreed upon time. They saw Carly and Dale sitting above them, about three rows from the back. There was really no way that acting ‘surprised’ might have been convincing. Dale stood up, scowled at Carly, and then stormed past them, heading for the exit.  
  
Carly was in hot pursuit. As she passed Nate, she said, “I think I got this. You guys save the seats.” Felipe and Nate went to where the girls had been, saving two seats empty between them.

**The Exhibitionist Next Door - 124: Walking Home**

Out in the lobby, Carly was dealing with a Dale who was both angry and crying, “Dale, you know you want to at least be friends. You’ve told me that. Friends go to movies together. Please give it a chance. You know you want to see the movie. Just sit and watch it. It will be fine.”  
  
“But now I’m crying. I don’t want him to see me crying!” said Dale.  
  
“Well, dry your eyes. And then let’s wait to go in until the previews start. He probably won’t be able to tell in the dark,” said Carly.  
  
“But what if he tries to hold my hand?” said Dale.  
  
“Dale, you fought off Jason, surely you can keep little old Nate at bay,” said Carly. Dale laughed, which made her feel better, brightening her mood. They went into the bathroom and Carly helped her fix her makeup.  
  
It had been so long that Nate was sure that the girls had left the theater altogether, but well into the previews, the girls walked back in. To his delight, Dale sat next to him, and Carly sat between her and Felipe. Her expression was stoic. It looked as if she were trying to appear as if she was going to sit there and ignore him.  
  
During the movie they didn’t talk, nor did he try to take her hand. He was positive that doing so would only go badly. It was an upbeat, feel-good movie, a comedy. He was glad about that. It might have been hard to sit through something depressing when he was feeling depressed. He would sneak glances at her face when he thought he could get away with it. It made him feel better to see her smiling and laughing.  
  
She was a beauty, and when she smiled, her inner beauty sparkled through. He knew that there were surely people who might not agree with him, that her beauty was superlative. Indeed there were lots of pretty girls. Lots of pretty girls at his high school, in fact. But what mattered to him, was his own opinion. And to him, there was not a prettier girl on the planet.  
  
It turned out to be very rehabilitative for Nate, to simply occupy a seat next to Dale. Being together, under circumstances that did not allow communication or confrontation, was restoring order to Nate’s universe.  
  
The movie ended, and the four of them congregated in the lobby, making small talk about the show they had just enjoyed together. Nate was hoping that things might develop such that he could continue to spend time with Dale. As expected, Carly proposed that all go to her house and order pizza.  
  
Dale said, “Thank you for the invitation Carly, but I’m not really in the mood for a pizza party tonight.”  
  
“Oh Dale, we’d have fun. Please! You’ve had such a tough week. It would do you good,” said Carly.  
  
“Well, I do have an idea I’ve been considering. I rode with you, so I don’t have a car here. Did you guys ride together?” she asked, looking at Nate and Felipe.  
  
“Felipe drove,” said Nate. “I’d love to give you a ride home, but I don’t have my car here.”  
  
“Well, that’s perfect,” said Dale, “because one option I was thinking about was for you and I to walk home together from here.”  
  
“That would probably take an hour and a half, or more,” said Nate.  
  
“That would be perfect. That is if you don’t mind being my captive audience, understanding, of course, that getting back together is not an option that we’ll be talking about,” said Dale.  
  
“I don’t like that stipulation,” said Nate.  
  
“Well, take it or leave it, Nate,” said Dale. “I very much want to talk to you, but I’m happy having Carly drop me home if my terms are unacceptable.”  
  
“Dale, are you sure you’ll be alright,” said Carly. “It’s a pretty long way, and it’s getting dark.”  
  
“I’m sure; I’ll be fine. If there is one thing I can say about Nate, it’s that he always got me home safe,” said Dale.  
  
“Okay then, I guess it is just you and me, Felipe. I’m not ready to call it a night,” said Carly.  
  
“Okay, Carlos, pizza was sounding pretty good. Since it is just the two of us, why don’t we go out rather than order in?” said Felipe.  
  
“Sure,” said Carly. “Dale, Nate, we could give you guys a ride home, but I’m sensing that you need this time together, so take the long way. And Nate, never forget that if something happens to her, your ass is mine!”  
  
“It’s my nuts I worry about around you, Carly,” said Nate.  
  
The theater was situated on the opposite side of town from where they lived, so the route home involved walking into downtown Prospect, through it, and then back out the other side. They did decide on a slightly longer route. It would take them via Madison Park, and then up the trail leading to the overlook they had visited together on several occasions.  
  
After they were done talking about the route home, Nate ventured into the more difficult subject matter, “Dale, why did you have to go and announce to Carly and Felipe that you were not open to discussing getting back together?”  
  
“Because I’m not. Sometimes there are no second chances. And because I’m still mad at you for cheating me,” said Dale.  
  
“Cheating you?” asked Nate.  
  
“Yes. You forced me to break up with you via text. That was mean! You cheated me out of the chance to tell you everything that I wanted to tell you,” said Dale.  
  
“You weren’t answering my texts…all day. I only treated you how you were treating me,” said Nate.  
  
“Do you realize how immature that sounds?” said Dale. “But now you are my captive audience, so you’ll have to listen. And you’ll hear things that you don’t want to hear, but it will be Okay, because I know that you are more mature than you sometimes sound.”  
  
“I’m not so sure I’m as mature as you think. Especially if maturity means that I have to come to understand why two people who are in love can’t be together, all because one of them made a mistake,” said Nate. “I know I am in love with you, and I heard you say that you loved me, even if it was only once and shouted down the hall from one jail cell to another. I can’t really believe that your feelings have changed that much, all due to what I have come to realize was a grave error.”  
  
“Let’s call it what it was. It was a betrayal, a betrayal of trust,” said Dale. “And as far as my feelings for you go, they are completely beside the point. Even if I do still love you, and I’m not saying that I do, but even if I do still love you, we can’t be together.”  
  
“Two people who are in love can’t be together? The logic escapes me,” said Nate. “And it wasn’t a betrayal. I did it for you, to give you an experience. I never betrayed you. I was aways there for you, and you were always safe.”  
  
“That sounds good, Nate. But that is not how it felt. It felt like a betrayal, a betrayal of my trust. Now hear me out. This is my ‘Central Reasoning’. This is what I had planned to tell you a week ago, at the flagpole,” said Dale. “I am a very stable, well behaved girl. I get good grades, and I succeed at whatever I decide to do. I have a future ahead of me. I’m not wild or crazy like my sister.”  
  
“Don’t remind me of your sister. Another one of my mistakes,” said Nate.  
  
“Correction, another one of your betrayals. You hurt me by mentioning and showing the DVD,” said Dale. “And it was a betrayal that you have not yet been punished for.”  
  
“But the tit free month? That was my punishment, you said,” said Nate.  
  
“Correction, the tit free month was an outcome of your surprise, so it was really part of a reward,” said Dale.  
  
“But if you break up with me, before the end of the month, then, well, that’s hardly fair. It’s hardly a reward under those circumstances. I mean to be waiting until I can touch and kiss the titters only to have that never happen,” said Nate. “And the lottery ticket! It would also be completely unfair to break up with me before actually conducting the lottery.”  
  
“I know it is a cliché, but remember Nate, ‘All’s fair in love and war,’” said Dale, and then pausing she continued. “And you poor, poor boy! All sad that you aren’t going to get to suck on the titters again, and sad that now we aren’t going to be losing our virginity in each other’s arms. Frankly, I’m sad about that too. But we’ll both adjust. It will come to seem to have been the right choice.”  
  
“Choice? You aren’t giving me any choice here, and it’s simply not fair. But you didn’t finish telling me your ‘Central Reasoning’ about why two people who are in love shouldn’t be together,” said Nate.  
  
“Face it, Nate. You want to f\*\*k me, and now you’re all sad because you’re not going to get to f\*\*k me,” said Dale.  
  
“That’s mean. Please don’t take our relationship to that level. Please don’t do that to ‘us’. I can take a lot, but I’m not sure I can take having everything turned into something so vulagar sounding,” said Nate.  
  
“I’m sorry. I was so hurt. You made me so very mad. It doesn’t bring out the best in me, but…”  
  
“Right! As I was saying, I’m a well-behaved girl with a future. Similarly you are a well behaved guy. And you’re doing so well this year with grades. You too have a future. Like me you don’t do drugs, drink, smoke, or shop lift. And you don’t speed unless you are trying to get your girlfriend’s naked ass behind bars, which is what you did. That was unforgivable!” said Dale. “But that is not the reason that I broke up with you.”  
  
“So if not that, then why?” asked Nate.  
  
“Did you listen to Fight Song after you got my text?” asked Dale.  
  
“I did. I used to like that song. Not so much now,” said Nate.

**The Exhibitionist Next Door - 125: Gasoline & Matches**

“It’s a great song. It really speaks to me. I was getting used to the idea that our lives, your life and my life, were merging. But suddenly I felt so alone, you weren’t in my corner. You were with Kelly. You forced me to, ‘take back my life’, Nate. So I can be strong, because you forced me to be strong. I wanted to be together. But now I am all alone, so ‘starting right now I’ll be strong’.”  
  
“Dale, it doesn’t have to be this way. Being strong doesn’t have to mean being apart,” said Nate.  
  
“Another line in that song spoke to me as well, Nate,” said Dale. “The line about matches.”  
  
“I don’t recall that particular line,” said Nate.  
  
“It goes:  
  
'I might only have one match, But I can make an explosion’,”  
  
said Dale. “Do you recall that line.”  
  
“It didn’t jump out at me, but I was focussed on the, ‘take back my life’ part of the chorus,” said Nate.  
  
“Well Nate, that song made me realize that you and I are like gasoline and matches,” said Dale. “If we are apart, then we have bright futures, but together crazy things start to happen. And it will only take one match. And then there will be an explosion, and both of our futures will go up in flames.”  
  
“That is not a reason to be apart. We can be together and focus on doing only sane things,” said Nate.  
  
“We might be able to do that for a while, Nate, but eventually this uncontrollable force will again take over, and the momentum will propel us toward an alternate future that we can avoid by going back to simply being neighbors” said Dale. “I was in a jail cell.  
A jail cell, Nate! You betrayed my trust, and landed my ass in a jail cell!”  
  
“It wasn’t real, Dale. You were safe. It was just to give you the experience!” said Nate.  
  
“Do you know what I saw there, Nate? There was one in your cell, too. I saw a toilet with no walls around it. I had to go, but I couldn’t bring myself to use it. I’ve been telling you for a while that getting caught seemed inevitable. For some time, I’ve been viewing it as simply what will happen, eventually. Talking to the principal and being inside of that cell with a toilet, looking out through the bars, made me realize that I have to step off the merry-go-round before my world comes apart. And your world too Nate! I’m doing this for you as well.”  
  
“That is fine. Let’s step off the merry-go-round together. We don’t have to be apart to stop taking the big risks,” said Nate.  
  
“But we do!” said Dale. “Like I said, together we are gasoline and matches. We can prevent a spark from burning up both of our futures, for a while, but only for a while. Eventually, we’ll both go down in flames. I never did anything crazy until it was you and me. And I’ve heard all your stories. They are very tame. Before I entered your life, you took no risks. Being apart is better for you too, it’s better for both of us.”  
  
After a pause, she continued, “This ‘experience’ as you call it, forced me to confront something that I have never really confronted before. For a long time, I have viewed getting caught as inevitable. But for some reason, I always took it lightly. I always laughed it off. It’s no laughing matter, Nate. You forced me to see that. It’s serious. It would not be fun, and it is not inevitable. We stay apart, and we stay safe.”  
  
“Dale, that is crazy. We have taken chances, but we can change,” said Nate. “Remember the Homecoming Dance? Who stopped you from going back to the dance nude? That was me, remember? I can push you, but I can also work to limit excesses that can happen when your adrenalin starts to take over. We can change!”  
  
“You are right, we can change, but not together,” said Dale. “The way to keep me safe from my adrenalin is to stay away from the drug entirely. Remember when I told you that – the girl who only dared to run around the golf course at night when no one was there – was dead and gone?”  
  
“Is she back?” asked Nate.  
  
“No silly, she’s still dead and gone,” said Dale. “When I told you that, I was telling you that I was going to be true to the inner me. In other words, I was going to be the real me, the bold exhibitionist me, and I wasn’t going to be the prim and proper girl at school trying to compensate for my naughty, golf course nudity side. I was going to merge it all and be the real me, at all times. Not nude all the time, of course, but more myself at all times.”  
  
“So which girl are you going to be now?” asked Nate. “I can’t wait to hear.”  
  
“I’m still going to be true to myself. I’m going to be myself, but I’m going to close the door on my nudist past, my nudist inclinations. No more running around the golf course at night, no nothing. And to do that, I also have to say good bye to you, Nate. You are a key component of the life I have turned my back on. You and my exhibitionism are inextricably linked. Please try and understand. These thoughts just kept going around and around in my head. Thoughts of my reputation being completely destroyed. My future gone. The life that I have worked so hard to build, and you of all people know how hard I’ve worked, all that shattered. My future changed forever, and not just a little bit, but changed into something terrible. Everything crumbled down to nothing. These thoughts just going around and around in my head. And you know me. When I decide to do something, I do it, and I do it well. I truly liked what we were doing. I love the memories. I fully expect that the memories of these months of fun will be my very best memories of all. Probably my favorite memories of my whole life. Maybe when I’m old and grey I’ll have regrets about saying goodbye to all this and goodbye to you. But I still have to do what I have to do. You will come to understand that I did it for us, for you. ”  
  
“But Dale, this sounds crazy. We will both be very unhappy. You know very well that we are in love and so very happy together,” said Nate. “We can make more nice memories together. Nice, less wild, but still very nice memories. Being happy is surely the most important thing in life.”  
  
“Even if that is true, it is irrelevant. I told you at the outset that getting back together is not on the table. But we can be friends, just friends and of course neighbors. If we try to be anything more, then it will spiral out of control and consume both of us. Don’t you see that I’m doing this for us, Nate?”  
  
“Dale, I always worked to provide a safe environment for our fun. I’ve allowed you the oportunity to try things out, with no real downside, don’t you see. I haven’t always gotten it right from the start. But I have been getting better at it. And even though the traffic stop wasn’t ideal, it still gave you a chance to view things without real downside. You’ve just explained to me the things that it has caused you to learn. And I’ve learned from it too. Granted, it would be nice if we could have learned these things without all this stress, but maybe we couldn’t have. Maybe there is a silver lining,” said Nate. “Maybe now you know how important it is to you to not view getting caught as something inevitable. Maybe this taste of getting caught can be the thing that uitmately prevents the unthinkable from actually happening. I’m so very happy to work with you to achieve common goals. And I so very much want to keep you safe.”  
  
“Nate, don’t you see? I felt safe around you. I tended to trust you, and therein lies the risk. If I’m not around you, I won’t be naked and taking chances. And if that doesn’t happen, then our futures stay bright. Don’t you see?”  
  
“No, I don’t see. And a minute ago, you said something that made no sense, whatsoever. You said, ‘I’m still going to be true to myself. I’m going to be myself, but I’m going to close the door on my nudist past, my nudist inclinations.’ Sure you see the irony in that statement. There is no way you can be true to yourself under those conditions. We both know that being true to yourself involves dealing with your craving for nudity, not pretending that it doesn’t exist. I can’t imagine how that can work. I know you. It will always be there. Denying that seems to simply be inviting disaster. The craving will grow, and with it the chance that you will do something crazy, and I might not be there to protect you.”  
  
The strength of the argument seemed to be lost on her. She seemed to think that she would be able to keep her panties on, if she simply stayed away from him. That was something he knew to be untrue. She had taken them off so many times before he entered the picture, and he knew that they would not stay in place if he were not in her life. She would still get naked, just not have him there to keep her from going back to the dance naked, or whatever it might be the next time.  
  
Nate tried to persuade her every which way, but she had made up her mind and he got nowhere. Eventually something came up that gave him the smallest particle of hope, the college visits. She asked, “Nate did you cancel the plans for next weekend? The plans to go to Eatonville and visit the University there as well as Watson College?”  
  
“Of course not. I’m still planning to go to college. Why would that have changed just because my life has become a living hell? I’ve been starting to realize that I might be going to Eatonville alone, but I’m still going,” said Nate.  
  
“Well, I still want to go. Let’s go together! But as friends, as neighbors,” said Dale.  
  
“But it will never work, remember gasoline and matches!” said Nate.  
  
“No, trust me. I’ve thought the details through carefully. We go as friends. Make sure our motel room has two beds. I’ll go shopping. I’ll buy some night gowns. I haven’t owned any of those for years, and I probably won’t like wearing them, but it will all work out. So no nudity, no kissing, just college visits,” said Dale.  
  
“This sounds crazy. Those aren’t the changes that we have to make to keep from damaging our futures. We can sleep in the same bed, you can sleep nude, we can kiss. Those things won’t get us arrested or kicked out of school. All we have to do is give up the public nudity. We can still be in love, and we can be a team, and we can keep each other safe,” said Nate. “I’ll keep you safe!”  
  
“I told you we weren’t going to talk about getting back together. I have it all figured out. Let’s just please go and visit the colleges, just as we had planned, but on my terms. It will be best for us. Please Nate!” she pleaded. “If we do it your way, it is a slippery slope. I know myself. You are part of the problem, but I’m probably the biggest part of the problem. Like you said, you had to talk me out of going back to the Homecoming Dance nude? I know myself. My adrenalin starts to flow, I get aroused, and I’ll do anything around you because you make me feel safe. The only solution is cold turkey. Which is an appropriate term because we both know that I am an addict, a junkie. Please try and see it my way.”  
  
“Well, I will agree to go to Eatonville with you. And we can do it your way. I’m still in love with you, and I want to be with you. And for me, being with you is the biggest part of our relationship. I love kissing you, and holding you, and I love your hot body. But it is who you are inside that I am completely in love with. Even if that person is talking crazy right now,” said Nate.  
  
“Thanks Nate, and remember, I’m doing it for our own good. Your good and my good,” said Dale.  
  
Nate finally gave up trying to talk any sense into her. He knew that she had broken up with him because of what she called his ‘betrayal of trust’. In the end, it was certainly related to the traffic stop ruse, but she had talked herself into thinking that their relationship was self-destructive. What could he do?

**The Exhibitionist Next Door - 126: "You Two Are Adults Now"**

As they neared their houses, Nate mentioned that he had received a package from Kelly that they were supposed to open together.  
  
“Is it another Kelly letter, because if it is, then I can tell you right now that we’re not going,” said Dale.  
  
“Boy, that is commitment,” said Nate, “Always in the past you would say we were going before hearing the letter. But one thing hasn’t changed. You still don’t need to hear the letter to make up your mind. But like I said, it’s a package. I don’t know if there is a letter.”  
  
More and more, Nate was noticing the large role that Dale’s emotions played in her decision making process. It was exceedingly obvious when she was nude and excited, but he had noticed it at other times as well. Then it was more subtle, but still evident.  
  
Her decisions related to the Kelly letters, were a clear example. She had always announced a decision prior to having all the details, any details, in fact. She tried to pass herself off as a very rational person, yet submitting to her urges had always been a key component of her personality. He thought back to how easy it had been to get her to agree to a plan that involved just her tennis shoe outfit, during the Homecoming Dance. She had agreed to it, giving him the requested items, even though she had no information to consider. And that had not been during a moment involving adrenalin.  
  
Dale responded, “Sherriff Kelly. I still can’t believe she’s a sheriff. And I can’t believe that you and she arranged all that. At the very least, that must be a gross misuse of public funds. She could certainly lose her job over that. Using the cars, the deputies, the jail itself all for her own fun. All to carry out her little domination fantasies. What a bizarre woman! I like her, but the part of me that likes her is the part of me that I have to turn my back on,” said Dale.  
  
“By the way, the two deputies that we dealt with weren’t on the clock that evening. There were other deputies on duty, out in the field. Alvarez and Petersen gave up free time to do that for Kelly, but you are right about the cars and the jail, but using those didn’t add cost for the taxpayer. We talked about this. Kelly even put gas in the cars out of her own pocket, but I was also surprised that she was willing to involve everything, county property, like she did. She sure trusts the deputies, but she is also very determined and fearless,” said Nate.  
  
When they walked into Nate’s house, his mother was on the couch reading. “Mom, I have some things I want to discuss with Dale, so we’ll be back in my room.”  
  
“Nate, that’s nice, but you don’t have to tell me. I’ve discussed this with Dale’s mother. She is actually the one who initiated our discussion. It is amazing the extent to which Dale’s parents trust you, Nate. You have made quite an impression upon them!  
  
“You two are adults, and you have spent the night together in hotels and fire lookouts. You are trusted, and as adults you will have to deal with the consequences of your own decisions. What I’m trying to say, is that as far as both sets of parents are concerned, you two can be together whenever and wherever you choose. Dale may even spend the night. In fact, you two may stay together at either house. As I said, Dale’s mother and I have discussed this.”  
  
Both Nate and Dale stood there dumbfounded. Neither had expected such a drastic change, and it surprised them to hear it spoken so bluntly, by none other than Nate’s mother. Nate thought about how ironic it was, he had blanket permission to be with the girl he loved, and she was going to buy nightgowns and never kiss him again. It hurt. It hurt bad.  
  
But his mother’s comments and expectations gave him an opening. He took Dale’s hand and led her back to his room. She didn’t resist, until they were in his room, at which point she pulled her hand free.  
  
Nate took a medium sized flat box out from under his bed. He got out his pocket knife and slit the seams. The two of them sat side by side on his bed. Dale took the box and examined the return address, giving it back to him.  
  
Inside there were two identical framed photos. He gave one to Dale, while he examined the other. Each frame held their two mugshots, side-by-side. Nate’s photo was on the left, Dale’s on the right. They were both looking directly into the camera and had about exactly the expressions that one sees in mug shots, somber, somewhat expressionless.  
  
Dale was surprised that her eyes were not as red as she was expecting them to be, but then she remembered that it was only later, once she had been left alone, that she had finally given in to full-blown crying. Prior to that, she had definitely sobbed, but had mostly been trying to maintain her composure while talking to Deputy Alvarez.  
  
The most glaring thing about the photos was Dale’s bare chest. Nate had his shirt on and held his number above his chest. Dale on the other hand was holding her number higher, up at collarbone level. Memories of Deputy Petersen telling her to hold her number higher, “so it would not be cut off” flashed through her mind.  
  
How naïve she had been! How odd that she not suspected a thing. He had been taking a titty photo, and probably doing so at Kelly’s bidding. In retrospect, she should have known right then that all was not on the up and up. Even if it all was not a ruse, she should have at least suspected right then that Deputy Petersen was up to something, or at a minimum, a pervert planning to keep a photo for himself.  
  
“Please pardon me for saying this friend, but ,My God, your tits are gorgeous!” said Nate. “The photo would be better if you were smiling, but who can manage to look up there with these tits stealing the show down below!”  
  
“Nate, stop that!” said Dale.  
  
“Stop what?” asked Nate.  
  
“As my friend, you have to stop talking to me like that,” said Dale.  
  
“Dale, I simply don’t see it that way. There are so many things about our relationship that aren’t going to put our futures at risk. It is my intent to show you that. What we do in this bedroom, how we talk to one another here, is private. I think what I need to show you is that you don’t have to go cold turkey on every aspect of our relationship to be safe,” said Nate.  
  
“But, my God, what nipples! Look how hard they are. If I could blow this up, I’d make one of your nipples with its jewelry attached as large as my wall, and I put it up right there,” he said pointing, “…and I’d stare at it and enjoy it every night before falling asleep and every morning when I wake up.”  
  
“Nate, don’t even think about doing that!” said Dale.  
  
“Why not? Its private. It won’t get you arrested or called into Mr. McRoberts’ office. My mom and dad, well, who knows what they would think, but even that wouldn’t negatively impact your future.”  
  
“Nate, I can’t take my copy home. Can you keep mine here, please?” asked Dale.  
  
“Absolutely. I’ll keep it safe with my blackmail stash. I guess that is what all the photos I have of you are now. Not mine to keep safe forever, but now mine to make use of!” said Nate.  
  
“Don’t consider doing that Nate,” said Dale.  
  
“Why not? If I can’t be your boyfriend and keep you safe, what is to stop me from becoming your evil EX?” said Nate.  
  
“Nate, you aren’t the blackmailer type,” said Dale.  
  
“Well, I did pretty good with the flagpole date,” said Nate. “You wouldn’t have gone along with that otherwise.”  
  
“Maybe, but I know you better now. I know that you care too much about me to hurt me,” said Dale.  
  
“Correction, I love you. Say it again correctly,” said Nate.  
  
“OK, I know you love me too much to hurt me,” said Dale, softly with a hint of reluctance.  
  
“That sounds better,” said Nate. “But I could always blackmail you. If I can’t get you to do my bidding because you want to, then I might be forced to use other means.”  
  
“Nate, don’t think about doing that. It would end badly. In the first place, I simply would not do what you try to get me to do. And then one of two things would happen. Either you would not do what you threatened – which is what I expect would happen – because you…you love me. Or you would release the photo and hurt me. And you don’t want to hurt me; that I know. And that would tarnish our memories. Let’s be happy with the memories, and move on to a new chapter as friends, Okay?”  
  
“I’m Okay with moving on to a new chapter. God knows that this chapter is not so wonderful, so how could the next be much worse,” said Nate.  
  
“Okay, I’ll keep the mug shots here, and safe. It is my hope that one day you’ll want yours. I expect that at the moment it evokes unpleasant memories for you. Hopefully that will change, with time,” said Nate. “Okay, here is Kelly’s letter,” said Nate.  
  
“Okay, read it, but we aren’t going,” said Dale.

**The Exhibitionist Next Door - 127: Trust...the First Night!**

They were still sitting side-by-side on the bed as Nate started reading:  
  
Dear Nate, dear Dale,  
  
I probably might have written ‘Carol’ above, but you know that I know your real name. That piece of information is safe with me, but I expect you might not be completely convinced of that after all that has happened. You should know that I take my role as Sheriff very seriously. The protection of the public is my number one duty. Please realize that the plan Nate and I put together was designed such that neither you nor anyone else was ever at risk. It was all about creating an illusion. An experience that Nate felt you wanted to have. And I admire him because he managed to put it together carefully, involving resources that he knew I had at my disposal.  
  
Here are your lovely mug shots. Truth be told, I have kept a copy, but I will send it to you, or destroy it, if that is your wish. Your fingerprints are in an envelope attached behind one of the framed prints. Nothing remains in the Sherriff’s office, no mug shots, no fingerprints. It is as if you were never there. You were never “Booked” so to speak. Dale, had you been an experienced criminal, you would have noticed that that critical step was omitted.  
  
Nate is a good man. Someone I have grown to admire. In many ways I envy you for having such a loving, dedicated guy at your side. My advice to you is to cherish him. I know that he cherishes you. I expect to have the DVDs from the hula hoop evening shortly. I will send them to Nate (Master and all copies), as soon as I have them. I would very much like to keep a copy, but I will only do so with your express permission.  
  
Sincerely,  
Sheriff Kelly Chapman  
  
PS: Did you take a good look at your mug shot numbers? That is Deputy Alvarez’s inside joke. If you still don’t get it, look at the big block numbers upside down.  
  
As Nate finished reading, they both studied the numbers they were holding up in the photos. “I hadn’t picked up until now that they were both the same, 55178,” said Nate. “And that is the first time I think she has included her last name, as I recall, on one of her letters.”  
  
“Or her title,” said Dale.  
  
Dale took the photo saying, “What about ‘55178’ could be a joke? She says, ‘an inside joke.’” Dale turned the photo upside down. “Oh I see it now. Do you Nate? See, the 5’s look like S’s. The 7 is a capital L. What does it spell?”  
  
“It spells ‘BLISS’,” said Nate. “What does ‘Bliss’ mean; ‘happy’ right?”  
  
‘Here let me google it,” said Dale. Continuing a moment later she said, “Here it is, “First definition: perfect happiness, serene joy. Second definition: paradise, the ecstatic joy of heaven. I’m not sure this is so funny.”  
  
“Right now it doesn’t seem funny at all. If that night ends up being the night I lost you for good, then there is nothing to laugh about, no joy,” said Nate.  
  
“Yeah, look at our expressions. We both look distraught. Like criminals, right?” said Dale.  
  
“I shouldn’t say this, but my expression is me trying to look like a common criminal. Yours, on the other hand, is authentic,” said Nate.  
  
“I recall her putting the numbers into the grooves while I was watching,” said Dale, “Does that mean that your mug shots were taken after mine? But you were already down in the cell.”  
  
“That’s true,” said Nate. “We had no idea how long we had before you arrived, so Deputy Petersen put me in the cell right away. They took me up a bit later and took my photos. The numbers were already in place.”  
  
“But you might have had to wait a long time if she had taken me to the hospital for the sexual assault exam,” said Dale.  
  
“Dale, she was never going to take you to the hospital. That was just talked about to make the experience seem all the more real to you. In other words, to give you another thing to worry about. If you had gone along with the idea, she was going to invent some reason why it couldn’t be done that evening,” said Nate. “The plan was always to bring you straight to the sheriff’s office. The hospital was not an environment that Kelly controlled. There would have been no way to keep you or your identy safe there. So Deputy Alvarez talked about it, but it was never part of the plan.”  
  
“You mean she was lying to me,” said Dale.  
  
“Which part of ‘she was lying to you’ have you still not figured out?” said Nate. “It was all a big lie, but you were always safe. I was trying to give you an experience: the experience of getting caught. And an extreme experience. Remember what you said before the hula hoop show? You said, ‘If I’m going to have this experience, I want to have the extreme experience.’ Well, I wanted you to have the extreme ‘getting caught’ experience. It could have ended at the car, but I wanted more for you. It hurts me that you call it ‘betrayal’, a ‘betrayal of trust’ but I need to try and picture it from your shoes.”  
  
“Yes, put yourself in my shoes, Nate,” said Dale laughing. “Actually that is funny. Shoes were all that I was wearing! But here is how it looked from my shoes. We get caught, but together. It’s me and you against the world. I realize that I can deal with anything, even legal repercussions, even jail, even my parents finding out. Why? Because I have you! It might get ugly, my parents might disown me. My college plans might go down the tubes. But it will be alright because I am in love with my Knight, and he loves me. Together we can make it through anything.  
  
“I yelled ‘I love you’ down the hall, and I heard your echo in return. You sounded so sincere. The world was in harmony. But then I come out into the hall and you are scheming with ‘that woman’. You are standing right beside her. Kelly was even holding your arm, do you remember that. She was touching you. I know that Henry was there, but you and Kelly looked like a couple. I felt so abandoned, so all alone. My world shattered! Sure, I find out that I am free to go, but that good news is far overshadowed by the bad news. You weren’t on my team. You and me against the world suddenly became the entire world against me, just me alone. Do you see why I use the word ‘betrayal’ now? You switched sides!”  
  
“Yes, now I see it from your perspective,” said Nate, “I see how it must have looked and felt. But know this, I have always been on your side. No matter what it looked like or felt like, I was always on your side. Kelly and I may have teamed up, but a couple? Really? That is crazy.”  
  
“You were on my side at my sister’s house? Again, that’s not how that felt,” said Dale. “It felt like you and she were ganging up on me. Luke seemed to be more on my side than you.  
  
“And it baffles me why you don’t seem to understand the extent to which you betrayed my trust,” said Dale. “The amount of trust destroyed in one evening is something that you need to try and wrap your little head around. From our very first day I trusted you immensely. Maybe it wasn’t logical, but I wanted to trust you. On a an irrational, emotional level, it just felt right. But on a rational level, I think that I bought into your reasoning that, ‘ I had been trusting you for years. I just didn’t know it.’ And then that first night in the tent. I still recall you offering me the sleeping bag to sleep in, but I unzipped it.”  
  
“I remember that,” said Nate. “What a pleasant memory that is!”  
  
“I surprised even myself by doing that. I didn’t even think about it. I just did it,” said Dale. “I felt comfortable around you, and I decided I wanted to sleep close to you.”  
  
There it was again, thought Nate. And this time, Dale was even admitting out loud that her emotions were controlling her actions. He knew that she did things without thinking them through, but she obviously was aware of it on some level as well.  
  
“Dale, I remember one line that you said to me that evening. A line that will be seared into my memory for as long as I live, because it is a line that I never thought that I’d ever hear you say. You said, ‘Nate, let’s go to bed’.”  
  
“I did say that, didn’t I?” said Dale. “But that just proves my point, about how strong my trust was from the beginning. I mean, I was completely naked. It was our first day together. We were miles from town, no one to hear me scream. And I am with a boy who I barely know, a boy much bigger and much stronger than me. And what do I do, I crawl into bed with him, and snuggle up against him. No girl in her right mind would do that, right? But down inside, I felt I could trust you.”  
  
“I didn’t take advantage of you,” said Nate.  
  
“No, you didn’t. I fell right asleep, but I would have woken up if you had tried anything,” said Dale. “Actually, I did wake up a time or two during the night. I even had a dream, maybe even an arousing dream, if I’m being honest. But each time I woke up, there you were, sleeping soundly. And there I was, excited, pressing my whole body against yours, but trying not to wake you up. I don’t know what you would have thought of me, if you had woken up. But my tits were smashed against the side of your chest, and my pussy was touching your thigh. It was even moist. It felt nice, but that’s why I couldn’t allow you to wake up. And what did you do? Fortunately you slept. And you held me. It was as if you were looking out for me, wanting me to feel safe. And guess what?”  
  
“What?” asked Nate.  
  
“I felt so very safe,” said Dale. “I knew that I could trust you, and you proved worthy. Even excited and vulnerable like I was that night, I knew that I could trust you. And my trust for you grew quickly. But then you knew what started to happen, you started to take advantage of my trust.”  
  
“I did?” asked Nate. “This is quite a story. You are making me feel very sorry that I was tired and slept so soundly that night. You are making me wonder what might have happened, had I woken up right then. But, why do you say that I took advantage of your trust?”

**The Exhibitionist Next Door - 128: Patty Cake**

“You did. You’ll recall that cracks in my trust started appearing. I’m sure you remember me saying, ‘I know I can trust you. I just don’t know what I can trust you to do.’ Surely you recall comments like that.”  
  
“Yes, I do. Things were not always so black and white. It was hard to figure out how to give you experiences and always be completely honest about things,” said Nate.  
  
“I know. I saw that. But it made for cracks in my trust, and then in one evening, it all shattered,” said Dale. “You told me you’d always give me the chance to back out. With Carly and Felipe…when did I have the chance to back out? And then with the traffic stop, sheriff thing, when did I have the chance to back out?”  
  
“Dale, I know I’ve made mistakes. Big mistakes.”  
  
“Yes, you have. And look where it has gotten us.” Said Dale.  
  
“But Dale, I love you. I’m fighting for us here,” said Nate. “What we have is something amazing, something worth fighting for. Even though I’ve made mistakes. Even though our relationship is numbered in just months, even though we only recently told each other ‘I love you’, even though we are young, I feel that we have feelings for each other that are deep and lasting. I know that couple-to-couple comparisons are impossible, but I can’t imagine that other couples feel this strongly, love this deeply. We are worth fighting for! I know you said it was not on the table for discussion. You say that you are breaking up with me for both of us. Well, I’m fighting for this relationship, for both of us. You and I deserve to be happy. Neither of us will be as happy apart. We are in love! You know we are. Lover’s belong together!”  
  
Nate thought that the depth of his feelings and the strength of his logic had to somehow turn things around. Much to his disappointment, Dale didn’t act as if he had made a dent in her amour. He was reminded of how much effort she gave to things once she had decided to do them. How she poured her heart into hula hooping for instance. Now it seemed as if maybe she had made up her mind to break up, and she was going to put all her effort into making it work.  
  
“Dale, I can’t believe that I am the only one in love here,” said Nate. “Surely you are still in love with me. At least admit that. Admit it to me. Admit it to yourself,” said Nate. “Please, I love you. I’m fighting for us here.”  
  
“Nate, I’ll always have feelings for you. I just can’t risk continuing to love you. I don’t know how I can love you after what has happened, but you’ll always be my first love. Always. No one can take that away from either of us. And I’ll always be thinking of you. We’ll be apart. Our destinies now lie apart, but I’ll always have such fond memories. I don’t want you to be sad.”  
  
“How can I not be sad,” said Nate. “And I’m not giving up. We are worth fighting for!”  
  
“Nate, you need to give up. But I have something to show you that might make you less sad. Will you please open up YouTube?” requested Dale.  
  
Nate got his laptop, and clicked through to YouTube, as requested.  
  
“Now search for, ‘Epic Patty Cake Song’,” said Dale. “Yes, now click this one, this one mentioning ‘I’ll think of you’ by Kurt Hugo Schneider. Now turn up the volume.”  
  
“Wow, 15 million views,” said Nate.  
  
“Pretty good for Patty Cake, right?” said Dale.  
  
The video started, showing two girls and two boys playing Patty Cake and singing acapela. They both listened and watched.  
  
I’ll think of you as I go  
So when I leave you’re not alone  
No matter where you are  
We will never be that far  
‘Cause I will think of you as I go  
  
I’ll think of you (I’ll think of you)  
As I dream (as I dream)  
So when it’s dark (so when its dark)  
You’ll be with me (you’ll be with me)  
And no matter where you are  
We can look up to the star  
And I will think of you as I dream  
  
Oh it’s a long and winding road  
But you don’t have to walk alone  
Cause no matter where we are  
I will keep you in my heart  
And I will think of you as I go  
  
“That is an amazing demonstration of Patty Cake skill, isn’t it?” said Dale.  
  
“That it is, but it acually makes me more sad. It’s such a sad song given our current situation,” said Nate. “I want to be together, Dale!”  
  
“Well, at one time, I did too. But the world has changed for me, so it is time for you to realize that it has changed for you as well,” said Dale  
  
“Dale, that is so harsh,” said Nate.  
  
“Well, at least this song is much less harsh than ‘Fight Song’,” said Dale. “Listen to that one, if you prefer, when you think back upon what happened.”  
  
A little while later, he walked her home. There was no kiss. He was surprised when she held out her hand to shake it goodnight. That hurt very badly. In part it hurt because he remembered shaking hands to seal the deal and become boyfriend and girlfriend.  
  
As he walked home alone, he thought back to when he had wanted to spend time with her when she was dressed. Back then it had been because it would signal a normalization of their relationship. Now suddenly it seemed as if she might never go nude again. Maybe real ‘normalization’ had come. If she got her way, they would just be friends and he would never see her nude again. Actually, it wasn’t her nudity that he missed the most. More than that, he was missing how close they had been emotionally.  
  
He tried to figure out what he could do to turn things around, now that he had heard her out. He had no ideas. The only thing that he could think of that might set things right was Dale’s craving for nudity. She had told him that after a week, the desire to be naked became almost overwhelming. Surely that hadn’t changed, and it had already been over a week.  
  
He thought that it was inevitable that she would need to be nude, and he knew that he was indispensable, in that one regard. Without him, all she could do was run around the golf course at night. He was trying to remember what she had said. Hadn’t she said that for her, that was now about as exciting as being nude in her own bathroom.  
  
As he was getting ready for bed, he decided to send Carly a thank you text. It read, “Carly, I can’t thank you enough. At this time it doesn’t seem as if I got anywhere. Talking to Dale tonight was like talking to a brick wall. But you were right. I needed to hear what she had to say, and I did. We spent over two hours talking, and I owe it all to you!”  
  
He got a quick reply, “I’m glad you two talked. Don’t give up! You’re still a shithead, but I’m going to keep after Dale, until you two are back together. But just so you know, it might not always look as if I am rooting for you. She has to think that I am on her side, so I might have to be a little hard on you.”  
  
Sunday ended up being a lazy day for Nate. He did some homework, he went for a run, but mostly he sat around the house feeling sorry for himself. He had just opened his Spanish book at the dining room table, after the dinner dishes had been cleared, when he received a text. At first he was excited to see that it was from Dale. But that changed to dread when he read, “Nate I need you. Memorial Hospital ER. Can you come?”

**The Exhibitionist Next Door - 129: Memorial Hospital ER**

He quickly banged out an, “On my way” reply, and was out the door before his parents had even noticed that he had gotten up. He hopped into his car, scrutinizing the Jordan house as he sped by. It looked dark and empty. His mind raced. What could it be? An auto accident maybe? At least whatever it was, she was able to text.  
  
Prospect was a small, one hospital town. Even though Memorial was all the way on the other side of town, it took him less than ten minutes to get there. He parked and sprinted for the Emergency Room entrance.  
  
Just inside, he quickly spotted Dale sitting in the waiting area, head buried in her hands. He shouted, “Dale!” She looked up and started running towards him. Her eyes were red and her cheeks wet with tears. Nate was so relieved. Whatever, whoever this was about, that at least it was not Dale. She was obviously uninjured.  
  
She grabbed him, holding him tight, pressing her wet face into his chest. Nate started asking questions, trying to find out what was wrong. Dale was having difficulty. Holding Nate had caused her tears to pour forth. But a few seconds later, he could tell that she was trying to get herself under control enough to answer his questions, to tell him what was going on. Her first attempt was unintelligible, but finally she got it out.  
  
“It’s Felipe, Nate. He’s been beaten up.”  
  
“Felipe? Really?” said Nate surprised.  
  
“He’s hurt, Nate. It’s bad. Carly’s with him, and she’s a mess. She’s crying worse than me, and she hardly ever cries. His parents are here, too. I hope you know them, because I don’t.” Dale again buried her face into his chest, but she was getting herself under control.  
  
“Can we go back and see him?” asked Nate.  
  
“I’m sure we can, but it’s a small area. There isn’t room for all of us if the nurse and doctor are still busy. We’ll have to make sure and stay out of their way,” said Dale  
  
“Who would beat up Felipe?” asked Nate. “He’s one of the most liked guys on the football team. I can’t imagine that he has a single enemy in the world. Was he robbed?”  
  
Dale spoke to someone in the small office, and they were “buzzed” in.  
  
“Nate, Carly thinks it was Darrell.”  
  
“Is he out of jail?” asked Nate.  
  
“No, he’s still in jail, but she thinks he had his friends do this to Felipe. She is so mad, Nate. She thinks Darrell’s friends saw her and Felipe together, and then told Darrell, who had this done to him,” said Dale. “You have to help me keep her from doing something bad. Carly has the combo to her dad’s gun safe, and she has had extensive firearms training. I don’t think she’d really do anything crazy, but she is a hot head… Can we work together on this? I really need you right now.”  
  
“Absolutely,” said Nate as they walked round a curtain, reaching Felipe’s bed.  
  
As soon as she saw him, Mrs. Fuentes ran to Nate, grabbing him and holding him tight.  
  
“Mrs. Fuentes, I’m so sorry,” said Nate.  
  
Mr. Fuentes hugged his wife as she held Nate. He looked pretty stoic, but Mrs. Fuentes had obviously been crying her eyes out. Nate then saw Carly sitting on a chair against the wall. She was sitting in the same position that Dale had been sitting in out in the lobby. She was obviously crying, her head down in her hands.  
  
“Who would do this to my Felipe?” asked Mrs. Fuentes of Nate.  
  
“I don’t know, Mrs. Fuentes. I don’t know,” said Nate.  
  
He examined Felipe lying there in a hospital gown. There was an I.V. tube in his right arm, where it was taped in place. An electronic monitor was connected to him, and Nate saw what looked like a heartbeat trace on it. It looked normal, but he had no idea how to read it, other than knowing about what a heartbeat line looked like.  
  
Felipe’s face looked swollen with areas red from abrasion and bleeding. The swelling was asymmetric. Felipe looked as if he were looking at him, but his look was blank. His left eye looked somewhat normal, but due to swelling his right eye was only visible through a small slit. His lips were very swollen, with what looked to be a spot or two that had bled, especially the lower lip. The upper lip looked to have a vertical cut, near the center. In terms of sheer size, the largest swollen area was his left cheek. The asymmetric look was essentially due to the combination of that cheek and his nearly swollen shut eye on the opposite side of his face.  
  
Breaking free of Mrs. Fuentes’ grasp, he walked to Felipe’s bedside. He had been unsure that Felipe was conscious until he saw his hand being raised an inch or two. He had never held Felipe’s hand before, but he grasped this one in both of his. It looked abused, about like his face, so he held it as gently as possible. By the looks of his hands, Nate could tell that Felipe had used them to fight back, or possibly to shield his face during the attack. His arms also showed evidence of bruising and had several lacerations. He expected that the rest of his body did as well.  
  
Felipe turned his head slightly and his eyes met Nate’s. It was obvious that he was hurting. He just lay there, not saying anything.  
  
Nate looked over at Carly. She was just staring blankly at him with her very red eyes. She also had bad makeup smears around her eyes and down her cheeks. He tried to get a sense of her thoughts, but he was unable to read her. She just stared at him blankly.  
  
Dale was standing right behind him, a little to one side, with her hand on his waist. He looked over at her, as he placed his hand comfortingly on top of hers. She was looking into Felipe’s eyes. There was an extreme amount of anguish and concern written all over her tear stained face. He turned back, looking again at his friend lying there in the bed.  
  
From behind him, Carly spoke abruptly, “Dale, what is this piece of shit doing here?”  
  
He and Dale both turned to look at Carly. She was still seated, but she was glaring at him, her eyes full of fire and hate. Dale spoke, “He’s Felipe’s friend.”  
  
“Some friend!” shouted Carly. “Where was he when Felipe really needed him? A true friend would have been at his side.”  
  
“Carly, that’s not fair,” said Dale, trying to return some calmness to the room.  
  
“I think it is,” said Carly, her voice raised. “Look what happens to the people around him. You’ve shed more tears this week than you have in the rest of your life, combined.”  
  
“Carly, this is hardly the time or the place,” said Dale, her voice purposely as calm as she could manage.  
  
“Hell it isn’t! He’s as big a shithead as Darrell. Why is he here? You didn’t call him did you?” asked Carly.

**The Exhibitionist Next Door - 130: Jodie Parker**

“I called him,” said Dale. “He’s Felipe’s friend.”  
  
“You’re out of your f\*\*king mind. The first sane thing you’ve said this entire fall is that you were done with him. God dammit, you told me you were done with him!” said Carly, getting to her feet and assuming an aggressive stance, her fists clenched.  
  
“Carly, please, not in the hospital,” said Nate.  
  
Nate knew she was a hothead, but why here? Why in front of Felipe’s parents?  
  
Dale sensing that Carly might get physical stepped in front of Nate. She extended her arms back, holding his hips, pulling him to her while making sure that he stayed straight behind her.  
  
“You keep out of this shithead,” said Carly to Nate, her voice at an inappropriate level for a hospital.  
  
Nate felt Dale holding him, trying to protect him, as she also worked at maneuvering him back. He realized that she was trying to gain a little more separation between them and Carly. He looked up and for and instant his eyes met Carly’s. She winked.  
  
‘What?’ he thought. But a moment later, comprehension flooded his brain and his heart filled with warmth. Never before had he felt true positive emotions for this girl, but suddenly he realized that things were not as they had seemed.  
  
Carly continued her rant, “Darrell’s not here, but Nate is. I’ve a mind to take him outside and give him the whipping that I so much want to give Darrell. God knows Nate deserves it! You know Nate deserves it!”  
  
With that, she reached out a hand, extending it over Dale, she popped him hard on the side of his head, right at his left ear.  
  
With one hand Dale pushed Carly back while clutching him close with her other arm. It was a most tender and protective hug, in spite of the fact that it was just one arm and she was facing away.  
  
Never before had he wanted to be kicked in the balls, but in that moment, Nate found himself wanting Carly to do her worst.  
  
“Carly, I know that you are mad at Darrell, but please don’t take it out on Nate. He’s not a bad guy,” said Dale.  
  
“He’s not a bad guy?” said Carly, mockingly. “You should listen to yourself! He’s a total shithead. Felipe’s the only decent guy on the planet, as far as I can tell. Why did you and I both have to get mixed up with shitheads, Dale? What did we ever do to deserve them?” With that, Carly stormed off.  
  
Dale turned to Nate, saying, “You stay here. I’ve got to look out for Carly.” To his surprise, she then raised up on her toes, giving him a quick kiss on the cheek and whispering “Thanks” into his ear. And then she ran off after Carly, saying, “I’ll text you, Nate.”  
  
Nate turned and looked at the Fuenteses. They had backed into a corner. They looked dumbstruck. Finally, Mrs. Fuentes broke the silence. “Who is Darrell?” she asked.  
  
Nate spent quite a bit of time with Felipe and his parents. He learned that Felipe’s injuries did not involve any broken bones or anything serious. There was lots of minor soft tissue damage, bruising, minor cuts and abrasions, but nothing that might be lasting. Nate eventually said ‘goodnight’ and headed home.  
  
A little while after arriving home he got a text from Dale, “Carly settling down a bit now. Can we talk tomorrow during lunch?”  
  
Nate replied, “Sure. Make sure that you and Carly lock your doors tonight.”  
  
The next morning in Spanish class, Dale again sat in the front of class, but she no longer seemed to be avoiding turning around. At least twice she made eye contact with him. To Nate it seemed as if the ice had been broken. They were now going to be talking, but talking, maybe just ‘as friends’, but talking nonetheless.  
  
At lunch, Nate and Dale met to talk. Dale filled Nate in on her conversations with Carly. Nate learned that Carly was going to visit Darrell in prison the next day. Her dad was going to drive her, and Dale had agreed to go along. According to Dale, she was going as moral support for Carly. Neither she nor Mr. Griffin were going to actually go inside the prison and visit Darrell, just Carly was planning to do that.  
  
At football practice, Nate informed both Head Coach Neal, and defensive line coach, Coach Maynard, about what had happened to Felipe. They were both quite concerned.  
  
After practice Nate and Coach Maynard drove together to visit Felipe. He had been released during the day, so he was at home, having spent just the one night in the Hospital. Both were glad to learn what the doctor had said, that Felipe had not suffered any injuries that would be lasting, but he sure looked terrible. According to Felipe, he had been beaten with padded bats.  
  
While Coach Maynard was speaking with Felipe’s mom, Felipe told Nate several things in confidence, among them that he had withheld some information from the cops, and from Carly as well, not wanting things to escalate.  
  
Those who had roughed him up had been quite specific to him regarding what would happen to him should he continue to be seen with Carly. So even though Carly did not know it, her suspicions were indeed correct.  
  
Felipe hadn’t realized that he had been playing with fire by socializing with Carly, and he was now struggling with the choices he was going to have to make in that regard. For that reason he was quite interested to learn what Nate had to say about Carly’s plans to go and visit Darrell. He had not had the chance to talk with her since the prior evening in the ER.  
  
While they looked terrible, the nature of the injuries was such that he would be able to return to playing football as soon as he felt good enough to do so. The doctor had thought that that might take about a week or two.  
  
On the short drive back from Felipe’s house, Coach Maynard brought up that he had heard about his breakup with Dale. Nate wasn’t surprised. Everyone seemed to know.  
  
The next day, Tuesday, Dale was indeed absent from school, as expected. For Nate, Spanish class seemed to drag. It had been his favorite class, but her absence made it clear to Nate why he had liked Spanish so much. Her presence brightened up any room, at least as far as he was concerned.  
  
The entire school day would have been one of those that are quickly forgotten, but for something that happened at lunch. Nate had eaten lunch with Kenny and Mason. They were two of his good friends, going way back, but his friendships with them were among those that he had been neglecting that fall. All the time he had been spending with Dale had come from somewhere. Since the breakup, he had been trying to reconnect with a few people.  
  
Kenny and Mason had just left and Nate had pushed his tray to the side, pulling out his notes to study for an upcoming chemistry test, when he heard a girl’s voice behind him, “Hey Social Climber.”  
  
He turned and was surprised to see Jodie Parker, the head cheerleader, looking through a stack of envelopes.  
  
She continued, “Somewhere here I have an invitation for you. I made it last night. I had expected that you would be coming to the party with Dale, so I hadn’t made you your own separate invitation. But now that you are a free agent…Oh, here it is,” she said, handing him the envelope. “Halloween this year falls on a Tuesday, so it is just one week from today. Too bad it’s a school night, but fortunately we’re seniors! We can all sleep in the next day, right?” She laughed at her own joke. She seemed ready to wander off, but then sat down next to him instead.  
  
Nate swallowed uncomfortably. With the exception of Dale and Carly, he was mostly his old self when it came to talking to the other pretty girls at school. Indeed he tried, but it took a lot of conscious effort. He tried looking her in the eye, but that quickly became uncomfortable. Fortunately, the envelope in his hand offered him an easy excuse to look down. Opening it, he said, “The Parker Halloween Party. I’m invited?”  
  
Nate had long known of the Parker Halloween Party. It was legendary in Prospect, but you had to be someone to be invited. To the best of his knowledge, the party had been started by Jodie’s oldest sister at least eight years prior. After she had graduated, the tradition had been continued by Jodie’s older brother. And when he had graduated, it had been Jodie’s turn to continue the annual rite.  
  
There had been talk about the party going around school. As Jodie was a senior, and there were no younger Parker siblings to continue the affair, it was widely thought that the next Parker Halloween Party would be the last.  
  
Now that Nate held an actual invitation in his hand, he knew exactly where the ‘rumor’ had come from. The cover of the printed invitation read, “You’re Invited to the Last Parker Halloween Party!”  
  
“You sure have done well for yourself this year, Nate!” said Jodie. “Very impressive Indeed! When you and Dale broke up, I gave little thought to inviting you to the party. Sorry, didn’t. Well, several of my friends set me straight on that score! So you definitely made the list, and there will be several unattached ladies at the party who are interested in getting to know Dale’s Ex a little better.”  
  
“Really, who?” asked Nate, instantly feeling like he had just put his foot in his mouth.  
  
“I’m sorry son, but it doesn’t work that way. Boys against girls. I play for the girl’s team. You’ll have to find each other by yourselves. If you are really having trouble finding any interested ladies at the party, then I might point you in the right direction late in the evening. But that won’t happen. Bees to the honey. As I imagine it, a few girls will be making their interest pretty obvious,” said Jodie.  
  
“Thanks Jodie,” said Nate.  
  
“No, thank you! This fall has been a very entertaining time here at Prospect High, thanks to your successful conquest of the illustrious Ms. Jordan. And even though that chapter seems to have concluded, I expect that the next chapter or two will be equally amusing. So, will you come?”  
  
“I’m thinking about it, Jodie,” said Nate. “This is a little hard to admit, but I don’t know if I’d be that comfortable. I ‘m sure I’ll know everyone, but I don’t think any of my good friends will be there.”  
  
“Well, more than half the football team is invited. I know that you know all of them pretty well,” said Jodie.  
  
“Felipe or Carly?” asked Nate.

**The Exhibitionist Next Door - 131: Departure**

“Puh-lease! But rumor has it that you still have an interest in Ms. Jordan. If so, that might be in your reason to attend. I know for a fact that she will be attending. Indeed, getting her to the party was job one! Now that she is suddenly single, the wolves are circling! This is, after all, the first time that she has come on the market in around two years. There will be quite a few Dale admirers wanting to give that a shot, so don’t expect to find her standing alone in a corner. But the way some of the girls are talking, I know you won’t have any want of company yourself. Like I said, the next few chapters promise to be very entertaining!”  
  
“I’ll think about it,” said Nate.  
  
“That’s not good enough, son. You’re coming, better get working on your costume! And come to think of it, I’m going to put someone in charge of getting you to the party. I’ll keep you posted,” said Jodie.  
  
Nate watched as Jodie walked away. ‘She sure is cute’ thought Nate. He had actually enjoyed talking to her. As far as he knew, that particular conversation had been the longest conversation he had ever had with one of the cheerleaders other than Dale. He felt really good about it because she had simply been talking with him, not talking at him or down to him.  
  
He wondered who the other girls that Jodie had spoken of might actually be, but he knew very well that he didn’t really care. His heart belonged to Dale. After all, pretty was just skin deep. To him, the other cheerleaders were like pretty cardboard cutouts, devoid of brains or personalities. Indeed, he knew that they had brains and personalities; he had just had such limited exposure. He knew what each girl looked like from a distance, but his familiarity with them more or less ended there. And yet the girls that Jodie was referring to might, of course, not be on the cheerleading squad.  
  
As he thought about it, the party started to sound like a nightmare scenario. There would be other guys around Dale, and girls around him. At the moment, their breakup didn’t seem real to him. But if and when either of them started dating other people, then their breakup would definitely feel official.  
  
He decided right then and there that he would be going. He couldn’t stand the idea of other guys with Dale, but he couldn’t let it happen in his absence either. And Jodie’s comments about putting someone in charge of getting him to the party: how strange! Is that how things worked at the top of the popularity food chain?  
  
The next day he found out who Jodie had assigned to the project. As he was almost ready to leave the locker room at the end of football practice, Cody Horton came over and talked to him. Cody was the starting Middle Linebacker.  
  
Nate had gotten to know him pretty well that year because he had joined the starting roster himself. The Middle Linebacker was the guy who called the formations in the huddle prior to each play, so in that regard he was like the Quarterback of the defensive team.  
  
Cody started off by making small talk, but then when he asked about the Parker Halloween Party, Nate clued in right away. He thought about calling Cody out, as Jodie’s plant, but decided against it. He had already decided to go to the party, so he might as well let Cody succeed at his assignment.  
  
Jodie would be happy, Cody would earn points with her, and it gave Nate a chance to get to know Cody a little better. He was someone who he truly admired. Like Dale, he was someone who was quite popular, but managed to get along with about everybody. He was very modest and soft spoken, especially considering his status on the football team.  
  
Nate finally gave in and agreed to go, but only if he could come up with a costume. Cody seemed as if he was prepared to deal with the ‘no costume’ line of resistance. He offered the costume he had worn the year before when he had gone as the Green Lantern.  
  
Nate ended up following him home to try it on. It was more or less a tight pair of pants and a matching shirt, essentially a costume made from things from the local Goodwill store, but the insignia was pretty well done. Included was a fitting mask bought on the Internet.  
  
Nate decided to accept the generous offer. Indeed he had no alternate ideas and they were similar enough in size that everything was a good fit, tight, but that was the super hero look.  
  
Nate told Cody that he didn’t have to come to pick him up, but Cody insisted, and Nate gave in.  
  
After they had parted, Nate decided that it was pretty funny. Better to think that than be sad, he decided. He had expected to go to the party with Dale as his date, but now he was going with Cody. Trading Dale for Cody was not something he wanted to dwell upon.  
  
Nate was so glad when Thursday, the day of their planned departure for Eatonville finally arrived. He had been looking forward to finally having some significant alone time with Dale. Indeed, it did not look as if it might be nearly as fun as he had hoped, back when he had first been putting the trip together, yet it was time with Dale. He liked being with her and he held out hope that they would manage to work things out. At least he was planning to give that his every effort.  
  
They had decided to leave straight from school at the beginning of lunch, missing their afternoon classes. He had seen Dale briefly the night before when she had brought her bag over to put in his trunk.  
  
As she climbed into his car for their departure from school, it really stood out to him how ‘dressed’ for the drive she looked. Her legs were covered down to her ankles, and he could tell that she obviously was wearing a bra under her shirt. The only bright spot was that it was one of the shirts that they had picked out together the night he had been introduced to Aunt Mary. To Nate it seemed like a good sign that she was sticking with her decision to wear more stylish necklines.  
  
He would have liked to have been stopping at the rest area for Dale to take something off for the drive, but he knew better than to bring that up, even as a joke. Since hearing all that Dale had had to say during their long talk after the movie, he had given a lot of thought to who he needed to be in order to win her back. He didn’t know if he was supposedly the ‘gasoline’ or the ‘matches’, but he needed to focus on being neither.  
  
Seeing her in a shirt that he recognized, he decided to use it as a conversation starter. “Dale, that shirt reminds me of your Aunt Mary. How is she doing?” he asked.  
  
“Oh she is fine,” said Dale. “You know what I find amusing. You only met her that once, but you sure won her over. I’ll swear she is your biggest fan.”  
  
“I actually met her twice. Remember, the blue dress. But I thought that Coach Maynard was my biggest fan,” said Nate.  
  
Nate noticed Dale looking at him with a look of consternation. ‘That must not have been the right thing to bring up,’ thought Nate.  
  
“Well, I guess you have more than one fan. But Coach Maynard…he sure has been giving me a hard time this week,” said Dale. “But knowing you, I’m sure you didn’t say anything disparaging about me.”  
  
“Certainly not!” said Nate. “I didn’t even bring you up until he did the evening he and I went to see Felipe. And all he said was how sorry he was about it.”  
  
“You didn’t tell him that I was the one who broke up with you?” asked Dale.  
  
“No. I expect he just knows me well enough to know that I would never break up with you,” said Nate.  
  
“Well, maybe,” said Dale. “But he did say something that surprised me. He is wondering where you will now find your motivation. He is wondering if you will continue to play your heart out, I think those were the words that he used, now that you don’t have your own personal cheerleader. Again, I think that is how he said it.”  
  
“He said that?” asked Nate.  
  
“He did, and more than once. He even said that he has already notice you slipping back into what he referred to as, ‘the old Nate’,” said Dale. “Have you really been a better football player this year because of me?”  
  
Nate took a moment to collect his thoughts. This was sort of a new angle, one that he hadn’t given much thought.  
  
“Dale, to be completely honest with you, everyone on the team is a better player because of you. Since we started going out, I’ve had a few conversations about this with other guys. Remember our first weekend, up on the mountain. I was delighted that you knew my jersey number and my position on the field. Everyone notices your heartfelt interest and enthusiasm, and not just for the team as a whole.  
  
“Individually, the guys all feel inspired by you, knowing that if they manage to accomplish something during a game, that you will come up to them the next day say something nice. Guys love that about you. Everyone finds it so impressive that you are actually watching the game from the sidelines. They don’t get that feeling from the other cheerleaders.”  
  
“I’m so glad to hear that. I do enjoy the games. I can’t be out there kicking butt myself, so I do what I can,” said Dale. “But you didn’t really answer my question. Has Nate Miller been a better player this year because of me?”  
  
That was exactly what he had been hoping she would say, so that he could add to his answer.  
  
“Dale, I’d be lying to you if I denied that. You already know about my grades and how much they’ve come up. In a way the same is true of football, but probably more so. Part of it must be due to the primitive male instinct…the animalistic desire to be attractive to potential mates.” Nate paused, seeing that Dale was laughing. “But that would be only part of it. Part of it is me recognizing and wanting to emulate you and your energy for the things that you do. As I’ve said before, I see you succeeding because you decide to succeed. And through your commitment, you bring about good things. I remember you telling our parents that we are both taking our studies more seriously because of our relationship, so I don’t think it is just me.  
  
“You’ve been saying the opposite, Dale. That together, we’ll go down in flames. But I think that the opposite is true, and I know I’ve heard that from you not all that long ago. Together we shine. Together our futures are bright. But back to what Coach Maynard said, I’m still trying to put in the effort. But I have had some trouble with focus since our breakup.”  
  
“To be completely honest, Nate, so have I,” said Dale. “I’ve been having trouble studying, and it has already hurt me in terms of a test score or two.”  
  
“Studying has been tough lately, for me too,” said Nate. “You’re never around in the evenings. We could still study together, you know.”

**The Exhibitionist Next Door - 132: Visiting Darrell**

“I’ve mostly been over at my Aunt Mary’s,” said Dale. “And speaking of Aunt Mary, my God. I spent hours telling her how terrible you were, and about all she would say was how she thought you were the guy for me because of how happy I am. Can you believe it? The whole time I was crying, and she’s telling me to not break up with you because of how happy I am. It is amazing how out of touch middle-aged people can be, right?”  
  
“If Aunt Mary is rooting for me, then you aren’t going to get me to agree that she is out of touch. But I am surprised that she was able to form much of an opinion of me, given how recently we were introduced. To be fair, our relationship also includes the time she helped me with the blue dress. But, as I recall, I didn’t talk much the evening we went to the food court together. You did most of the talking that evening,” said Nate. “But I do like Mary. It is amazing how cool she is with knowing about your exhibitionist side.”  
  
“You mean, ‘my former exhibitionist side’. But yeah, Mary has always been good about accepting me for who I am, rather than trying to change me,” said Dale.  
  
“I like her,” said Nate, glad to learn that Mary was on his side. “Tell me about your drive to the prison. I have hardly talked with you since then. Did it go Okay?”  
  
“Oh it was fine. But you know, something is strange about Carly now. I spent so much time with her and Mary after the sheriff’s department betrayal. On the one side I had Mary telling me to get over it. Telling me, ‘you love the boy, patch things up’. And the whole time, Carly was like, ‘Dale, I was telling you to break up with shithead. You should have listened to me before.’ The two of them would argue. It was pretty funny in retrospect. Here I am crying, and here they are arguing about whether or not you are a shithead.”  
  
“You know, I’ve gotten pretty tired of that nickname, ‘shithead’. It is pretty hard to hear yourself being referred to by the same derogatory term over and over. I don’t really get why she picked that and sticks to it like she does. It seems awfully uncreative of her to never call me other mean things.”  
  
“I have to admit that at first, when she would call you that, that I didn’t like it. I felt bad for you, and I wished she would stop,” said Dale. “But now, I’m thinking that it sort of ‘rings true’.”  
  
“Ouch, ouch,” said Nate.  
  
“I’m trying to give you a hard time, but you know you deserve it. But the nickname – that is just Carly. Even if she someday starts to like you, she’ll still call you shithead.”  
  
“Little chance of her ever liking me,” said Nate.  
  
“I don’t know about that,” said Dale. “Like I started to say, something is strange about her the last few days. She is still saying the meanest things about you, but suddenly it seems as if she is doing so in an attempt to provoke me into defending you. So my guess is that you might have made quite a bit of progress in that regard. She apparently doesn’t think I’m perceptive enough to pick up the minute changes in her tone of voice. Why do you think she might now be in the ‘patch things up with Nate camp’ all of a sudden?”  
  
“Well, that would be hard to imagine, but if she is, then I would say that she has finally realized how adorable I am,” said Nate.  
  
He looked over, and Dale seemed to be laughing to herself, looking out her passenger side window.  
  
The route to Eatonville took them part of the way toward the capital, but then they would turn off and head north. They would pass the butte they had climbed on the east.  
  
Nate continued, “but it’s hard to imagine that she might not hate me now. That night in the ER, I’m sure I would have suffered another painful kick to the balls if you hadn’t been standing between us.”  
  
“That’s sure what it seemed like to me too,” said Dale. Nate remembered how convinced he had been of Carly’s animosity, that is, until he had seen the wink. “But if you think Carly was hard on you, wait ‘til you hear what she told me that she told Darrell.”  
  
“What did she tell him?” asked Nate.  
  
“First I have to tell you that she selected her footwear that day, with the intention of kicking him in the balls. She was hoping that she’d get put in a visitation room with him, so that she’d be able to carry out that part of her plan,” said Dale.  
  
“Pointy shoes?” asked Nate.  
  
“Boots actually, but yes, hard and pointy,” said Dale. “But Darrell was spared that part of her wrath because they had to talk through a window. She told me that she told him that if he came around after he got out of prison, that she would pretend to like him, and then one night after she had let him f\*\*k her, and he had fallen asleep, she would tie his hands and legs to the corners of the bed frame, and cut off his dick and balls…everything. She told him that she would turn him into a girl down there. She told him that that was what would happen to him if no one bothered Felipe ever again,” said Dale.  
  
“She had a worse punishment for him, if Felipe got beaten up again?” asked Nate. “There’s a worse punishment than being bobbittized?”  
  
“Bobbittized?” asked Dale.  
  
“You know, Lorena Bobbitt,” said Nate. He saw the blank look on Dale’s face. “You’re not telling me that only guys have heard of Lorena Bobbitt?”  
  
“Who’s Lorena Bobbitt?” asked Dale.  
  
“Never mind,” said Nate. “Please tell me the rest of what Carly said.”  
  
“Well, she says that she told him that if Felipe got hurt again, then after she had cut off his dick and balls, she would put them in his mouth. She would force his dick down his throat. She told him that he would then choke to death on his own dick,” said Dale. “So what do you think? Do you think Darrell is going to try to hook up with her when he gets out?”  
  
“Only in chainmail underpants,” said Nate.  
  
“Do they make those?” asked Dale.  
  
“I don’t know,” said Nate. “Carly is a bit scary. I piss you off, and you break up with me. I thought that was the worst punishment imaginable, yet I still have my dick.”  
  
“Yeah, see how lucky you are!” said Dale.  
  
“I hardly feel lucky, but I guess it could be worse,” said Nate. “Is there more?”  
  
“No, that was pretty much the high point of the trip, for me anyway,” said Dale. “Carly mostly just told him what she had to say. That she was no longer his girl, and that his dick was forfeit if he and his pals didn’t leave Felipe and her alone.”  
  
“So is she now Felipe’s girl?” asked Nate.  
  
“Not yet, but that’s where I see this headed,” said Dale.  
  
“I hope so. But I know that Felipe is pretty rattled. Between you and me, there were some serious threats made. Threats that he didn’t tell Carly or the cops about.”  
  
“I think Carly suspects as much,” said Dale. “But Carly is a force to be reckoned with. I expect that she will be able to keep Felipe safe, and make him feel safe. She’s not done in terms of who she is planning to get in touch with. I expect those boots of hers will see some action yet…probably this weekend while we are out of town.”  
  
Nate was concerned for Carly, but glad to hear that she was pursuing a plan. He wanted Felipe and Carly to feel as if they could continue seeing each other.  
  
Nate decided at that point to bring up something he wanted to talk about, “Dale, there is something I need to mention. I had planned a surprise for you in Eatonville. It involved equal parts of nudity and public exposure. Truth be told, I was very excited about it, and it is something that has been in the works since we first talked about Halloween long ago, the night we watched the movie with Ika in it.”  
  
“You arranged for me to be Ika at a Halloween party in Eatonville?” asked Dale.  
  
“No, not that, but something else that the old you would probably like a lot,” said Nate.  
  
“You know I don’t do nudity any more, Nate,” said Dale.  
  
“Well, back when I arranged this, you did,” said Nate. “And now I have a problem. It’s not your problem, it’s my problem. I know that. My cousin goes to the U, and he is in a fraternity, Phi Gamma Tau. Well I called him back before school started. His name is Daniel, Daniel Miller.”  
  
“Do I know him?” asked Dale.  
  
“I don’t see how you could know him. He’s visited us in Prospect, but he has never lived in Prospect. Well, in talking to him I learned that his fraternity has a big annual event. They put on a spook alley, and they put a lot of effort into it, starting even before school starts each fall. This year they wanted a girl to doing something daring, and they had not been able to talk any of their girls into doing it,” said Nate. “As you are guessing, I volunteered you, so they are counting on you, but now I obviously have to go and tell them that the deal is off. But like I said, that is my problem.”  
  
Nate had expected Dale to say something. Instead she just sat there, staring out the window, straight down the road. Finally she asked, “How daring?”  
  
“Well, in terms of what you have done, not that daring. But obviously more daring than what other girls are willing to do,” said Nate. He was hoping that she would at least want to hear about what the plan had been. He still held out a small hope that she might be feeling the need to be nude and that she might want to do it, but he knew that it would be better if that didn’t happen. After all, he needed to win the argument that they could be together and not have it seem like they were gasoline and matches.  
  
“More daring than what other girls are willing to do? Surely you can be more specific,” said Dale.  
  
“It doesn’t really matter. We are coming up here for college visits after all. I of course don’t owe Daniel’s fraternity anything. It’s just a little awkward. I expect they’ll understand,” said Nate. “But now that you are a captive audience, I do have something for you. I appreciate everything that you told me on our walk home after the movie. I love you and I just want you to know that I cannot turn my back on that. I have a small token for you.” He took an envelope down from above his visor and handed it to her.  
  
“What is this?” asked Dale.  
  
“Just open it. It will be self-explanatory,” said Nate.  
  
Dale opened the envelope then peeked in at the contents. “You ripped up my sister’s Rain check?” she asked.

**The Exhibitionist Next Door - 133: The Former Plan**

“Of course. What else would I ever do with it?” said Nate. “I wanted you to know that it was destroyed. You can throw the pieces away or you can save them and use them to embarrass her someday. Your choice.”  
  
“But Nate, you could have kept this and redeemed it at Thanksgiving. Now that we are not a couple, you should have made her do that. I mean, why not?” said Dale.  
  
“I would never do that. She wouldn’t enjoy it; I wouldn’t enjoy it. We both know that your sister did this to drive us apart and get back at you,” said Nate.  
  
“But Nate, guys like blow jobs. Of course you’d enjoy it. You should make her give you one,” said Dale.  
  
“Dale, you know me better than that, don’t you?” asked Nate. “For me it has always been all about my relationship with you, and never about my own sexual gratification. How many times did you send me home with a hard-on? A hard-on that you yourself caused. And you know that I never complained. And you know very well that I even turned a blow job down from you.”  
  
“I’ll bet you are regretting that now,” said Dale.  
  
“Actually not, end of story, all right?” said Nate.  
  
“OK, but you didn’t tell me what you had arranged with your cousin. What were you going to have me do at the fraternity spook alley?” asked Dale.  
  
“Like I said, it doesn’t matter anymore anyway. I’ll let Daniel know he is on his own. The unfortunate thing is that the old you would have enjoyed it a lot, I’m sure. The funny thing is that I didn’t even promise that you would do it nude, not even topless,” said Nate.  
  
“What, you signed me up to do something that wasn’t even topless?” asked Dale.  
  
“Well, I thought that you would do it topless, maybe nude, but that wasn’t the commitment,” said Nate.  
  
“But then what about it was so daring that they couldn’t talk a college girl into doing it?” asked Dale.  
  
“It doesn’t really matter, like I said. You have put all that stuff behind you. And that is fine. You and I are only like gasoline and matches if we choose to be. We can be together, we can be boyfriend and girlfriend, and you don’t have to go nude… ever,” said Nate.  
  
“Just tell me about the spook alley plan, please,” said Dale.  
  
“Dale, after I tore up your sister’s Rain check, I looked at the Dale Jordan Lottery ticket. I couldn’t bring myself to tear it up. For a time, I was planning on giving it back to you, whole. In the end, I couldn’t even bring myself to do that. And you are probably just going to think that that is about sex. But that’s not the reason that I’m not giving it back to you today,” said Nate.  
  
“Sure it is,” said Dale.  
  
“Hey, give me a little credit,” said Nate. “OK, the real reason that I couldn’t bring myself to give it back was how close we were at that moment. That was probably the peak. That hug we shared then, it felt so very close. I almost cried…honestly. I know that is before we each said ‘I love you’, but I was so in love that evening. The amount of emotion and trust that you showed me by the simple act of making that card and giving it to me was very moving. I know that now you won’t hold the Dale Jordan Virginity Lottery, so I know that the ticket has no meaning other than what it means to me as a memento,” said Nate.  
  
“You aren’t really that sentimental,” said Dale.  
  
“Well, maybe I am. And the other reason I am attached to the lottery ticket? The other reason is that it is so you! The girl who is never willing to settle for being average. You told me, ‘If I’m going to do it, I intend to do it well. And that includes losing my virginity!’ To me it is still hilarious that you were even thinking of trying to make the event even more fun for the lucky lad.”  
  
“You can keep the lottery ticket, Nate. It’s sad to me too that the lottery won’t happen,” said Dale. “I’m also in love with the memory of the couple that we were. And I know you won’t seek to hurt me by sharing it with anyone.”  
  
“I would never do that. If I ever wanted to hurt you, I have so many nude photos. It would be so hard to choose. Maybe I’d pick your ‘55178’ photo,” said Nate. He looked over and saw a puzzled look on her face.  
  
“Oh right, BLISS, the mug shot,” said Dale. “Yes, if that got out, I would have a lot of ‘splainin’ to do. Fortunately, it probably looks like a joke photo because it is topless. Real mug shots would probably never be topless. But Nate, I still want you to tell me about the spook alley plan. Please tell me what I am missing out on. Even if I have decided I have to turn my back on certain things, it doesn’t mean that I don’t want to know what I am turning my back on. If I didn’t have to be topless, then what was I going to be wearing?”  
  
“Well, I am not sure it is right to tell you more about it. You know, I don’t want to make it hard on you – hard to stick with your new resolution,” said Nate.  
  
“Please, Nate!”  
  
“Well, the frat guys actually did want a topless girl. And like I said, I thought the old you would even do what they had in mind, maybe even fully nude, but the last time I talked to them, they had all but given up. When they couldn’t get any of their girlfriends to agree to topless, they weren’t even trying for that anymore,” said Nate.  
  
“What were they asking a girl to wear at that point?” asked Dale.  
  
“Are you sure you want to know?” asked Nate.  
  
“Please tell me,” said Dale.  
  
Nate thought that the direction the conversation had taken was pretty funny. Dale was essentially begging to know what the plan had been. On the one hand, he wanted to tell her and even try and get her to do it, but on the other hand, that would support her contention that together they were like gasoline and matches. “Dale, I probably shouldn’t tell you. How can I convince you that we aren’t like gasoline and matches, if this conversation continues?”  
  
“Nate, just telling me doesn’t get me naked. Please tell me!” she said.  
  
“OK, but remember that you insisted,” said Nate. “They wanted the girl to be wearing lingerie. I’ll tell you what specifically, if you don’t get mad.”  
  
“Oh, I won’t be mad. Why would I be mad? I do want to know,” said Dale.  
  
“Well, maybe because I gave them your sizes,” said Nate. “They wanted a very innocent look for the girl in this particular spook alley scene, so everything white and lacy. And they said that you could keep the lingerie after the spook alley. Daniel described the lingerie that they had picked out for you to wear. Are you sure you want to hear this?”  
  
“Oh my God, Nate! Just tell me already!” said Dale, obviously impatient.  
  
“Well they said the bra was low cut, but such that none of the nipples would show, but almost. And like I said, very lacy, and with a little tiny baby blue bow right in the center,” said Nate.  
  
“That sounds pretty,” said Dale. “And the panties?”  
  
“Well, remember I haven’t seen anything, but what they described were matching thong panties. They told me that they were also very lacy. They said that black hair might show through a bit, but that lighter hair wouldn’t. I think I let slip that, in your case, nothing would show through because there wasn’t anything to show through. Oh yeah, and they said they looked very pretty and had a matching little blue bow in the center, on the waistband,” said Nate.  
  
“And they couldn’t find a college girl willing to wear that outfit?” asked Dale.  
  
“Well, there is more.”  
  
“Why am I not surprised,” said Dale.  
  
“Yes, the matching ensemble includes what they were calling a little modesty skirt. They told me it is also lacey, so a little lacy miniskirt. If you had the whole outfit on then the thong would be fully covered. At least that is what they told me,” said Nate.  
  
“So then why couldn’t they get a college girl to agree to wear that?” asked Dale.  
  
“It hardly sounds like a Halloween spook alley costume, does it?” said Nate. “I had thought that you and I would work out Halloween costumes that went together, but before we got a chance, our relationship was in shambles. I had always been thinking Ika and her cave husband, but I never figured out a way that you could do that. I mean, nudity at a party in Prospect,” said Nate.  
  
“Nate, you keep changing the subject. Why couldn’t they get a college girl to dress like that for their spook alley?” asked Dale.  
  
“I’d hoped that we’d be invited to the Parker Halloween Party and could go together, in coordinated costumes. I’ve never been to it. It would be cool to me to go once,” said Nate.  
  
“I had also thought we’d go together. And I had ideas for costumes, but nothing risqué. I couldn’t do that at that party. Maybe a little risqué, like the other girls wear. Something skimpy maybe, but no nudity. Some of the girl’s costumes they sell are pretty naughty looking, really, really short skirts. But Nate, tell me about the frat plan, please. Don’t make me beg,” said Dale.  
  
“And then this week – I think it was the day you went to the prison with Carly – Jodie gave me an invitation to her party,” said Nate.  
  
“Nate…” said Dale pleadingly.  
  
“Yeah, so Jodie invited me. She even said that she was inviting me because there were girls interested in – I think she said something like – “getting to know Dale’s Ex a little better.’ She also told me that the wolves would be circling around you. How so many guys are excited that you are on the market…for the first time in two years,” said Nate.  
  
“I know. I don’t like that. As soon as the word spread about us, I had guys calling,” said Dale. “I’m not ready to talk to anyone else. And I doubt I’ll be able to stand seeing you with a girl either, especially any of the girls I know.”  
  
“I’d like to imagine that that might be because you still have feelings for me,” said Nate.

**The Exhibitionist Next Door - 134: Merinthophobia**

“I do, Nate, to be honest, but like I said, we can’t be together,” said Dale. “But I really enjoy being with you, and I’m glad we are doing this this weekend.”  
  
“Dale, I can’t give up. I’ve never been in love before. If I lose you, I expect that I’ll never be in love again,” said Nate.  
  
“Oh, Nate, you will. Don’t try and make me sad. Just remember:  
  
“‘Cause no matter where we are  
I will keep you in my heart  
And I will think of you as I go.  
  
“But please, tell me the rest of the spook alley plan. There’s something you aren’t telling me if they couldn’t find a girl willing to wear lingerie like you described. I could even wear that, and it wouldn’t violate my no-nudity oath. And then you wouldn’t have to break your promise to Daniel. Is this girl going to be the innocent virgin being killed by a demon on an altar with a chainsaw, or something? That wouldn’t be all that bad,” said Dale.  
  
“I can’t tell you everything. While all I committed you to was the bra, thong and skirt, I was sure you’d end up wearing less. But you broke up with me describing how we are gasoline and matches. And how that will lead to our futures burning up. Our future, our future together, is important to me. I intend to show you that we can, in fact, be together in a world where all your clothes stay on,” said Nate.  
  
“But Nate, I’d be in lingerie. That would count,” said Dale.  
  
“But what if the bra comes off, what if the thong and skirt evaporate. Then you’ll say ‘see…gasoline and matches’. As pretty as you are naked, my job has to be to keep you dressed. Because if you end up nude in public, my chance of putting our relationship back together goes down. We should probably just have your clothes sewn on you,” said Nate.  
  
Nate looked over at Dale. She was staring down the road. He saw a tear roll down her cheek. “Dale, are you crying?” asked Nate. “What’s wrong?”  
  
Dale started crying harder, once her cover was blown. She looked over at him and their eyes met. “Here, I’ll take this exit so that we can talk. I didn’t realize you were crying. I’m sorry. I was just driving and talking,” said Nate.  
  
Once he had stopped the car, Nate turned to Dale asking, “I’m sorry. Was it something I said? Why are you crying?”  
  
“Nate, sometimes you are a bit slow. Why don’t you realize that I’m in a full-blown crisis here? The past couple of weeks have been so hard for me. I had gotten used to being able to tell you everything, having a best friend, a best friend I could talk to. I loved being so close. But then you decided to be the problem, so I’ve had no one I could really talk to. I tried talking to Aunt Mary and Carly. They helped me a lot, but it’s not the same.” She paused.  
  
“I’m listening Dale, thanks for talking,” said Nate.  
  
“Well, this has been so hard for me. I’ve never been through a crisis like this before. You had become so important to me, and the nudity. Well, I had really been enjoying getting in touch with that side of me, as well. And suddenly it seemed like I had no choice but to give up both. In other words, give up two things at the same time. Two things that are dear to me, and have been so central to my very existence.  
  
“And now it feels like you are giving me a hard time. Just because I used the term ‘gasoline and matches’ doesn’t mean I want to hear you say it over and over. Can’t you please try and be a little understanding about what I’m going through, rather than just trying to make me feel bad for having made the toughest decision of my life,” said Dale.  
  
“I’m trying. I mean, I’ll try harder, Dale,” said Nate.  
  
“Well then let me wear the lingerie in the spook alley, but tell me everything,” said Dale.  
  
“Thanks for talking to me and telling me how you are feeling. I guess I didn’t think about this possibly being a crisis for you. I know that it is sure hard for me, so that only makes sense. But understand that it is hard for me to tell you about the spook alley like this, here in the car. It was going to be a surprise,” said Nate. “I had intended for the spook alley plan to be a surprise.”  
  
“Well, then let it be a surprise. If you thought I could do it nude, then I should be able to do it in lingerie. And I’ll feel better about that because I don’t want to let Daniel and his fraternity down any more than you do,” said Dale. “I don’t want to make you let them down.”  
  
“But surprises are hard for me now,” said Nate. “I know that you like being surprised. You’ve told me so yourself. But my last surprise missed the mark. You termed it a ‘betrayal’, a ‘betrayal of trust’. So now I don’t know…I mean…I worry about surprising you. After our first weekend together I thought I pretty much had you figured out. ‘She likes to be naked, she likes to be seen, but her reputation in Prospect needs to remain intact,’ stuff like that. And here we are months later, and I’ve got a long way to go before I’ll feel like I have you figured out.”  
  
“I’m not going to apologize for that. I guess I’m glad to know that my personality is more complex than a simple mathematical formula,” said Dale. “But please, Nate. Try and give me a little space while I work through this crisis. And try and be understanding. I know what I need to do. I know what I intend to do, but deep inside, I haven’t really changed. I feel cooped up inside these clothes. Just because I’ve turned my back on nudity, doesn’t mean it will be easy. Just because I have broken up with you, doesn’t mean that I don’t cry about it.”  
  
“You cry about it?” asked Nate.  
  
“Every night,” said Dale.  
  
“Dale, I’m sorry, I guess I was mostly just seeing it from my perspective,” said Nate.  
  
“Now, can you please let me have this experience? The lingerie sounds fun, and the idea of a spook alley sounds fun. I have always like Halloween. Whatever else that is scary and goes with it, well, that must be okay. I know that you know me better than anyone else ever has, so you probably wouldn’t be putting my in another position that will seem like a betrayal. Leave my sister out of it and don’t get my ass behind bars, and we are probably good. And the lingerie doesn’t sound like I’ll be breaking my resolution,” said Dale.  
  
“Well, I am probably okay with letting you do it, but I am worried that you’ll get naked and that that will be a roadblock keeping us from getting back together,” said Nate. “I want you to promise me that you’ll be good.”  
  
“I promise,” said Dale.  
  
“Try that again, and this time, make it sound like you mean it,” said Nate. “I know that I won’t be taking off your lingerie off, so if you are really committed to keeping it on too, then I guess I am comfortable with allowing this to go forward. Just let me hear your promise to be good, again.”  
  
“I promise to be good. I’ll keep my clothes on,” said Dale. “I mean, the bra and panties on.”  
  
The direction things had taken gave Nate confidence in his strategy. Her urges were still obviously intact. While counting on them to create a situation that would hopefully bring the two of them back together seemed overly simplistic, it still seemed like his best option. He hoped that she would be able to have fun while keeping the lingerie on; however, he knew her too well to be positive that she would stay dressed, even though she had promised to ‘be good’.  
  
“That’s better,” said Nate. “I guess I’ll let you do it, but I have one more thing to ask you. I don’t think either of us wants an ugly surprise. You don’t by chance have Merinthophobia do you?” asked Nate.  
  
“What is that?” asked Dale. “I’ve never even heard of that.”  
  
“Well, if you don’t even know what it is, then you probably don’t have it,” said Nate, “and I haven’t seen any indication that you have an undiagnosed case of that particular phobia, so I doubt it is a problem.”  
  
“What is it?” asked Dale. “Fear of being coated in fake Halloween blood? Am I going to be coated in blood?”  
  
“Oh no, not that, but I shouldn’t tell you anymore.”  
  
“Fear of being painted up to look like a zombie virgin in wedding night lingerie, maybe?”  
  
“I’m not saying, and enough with the guessing! You don’t like it when I try and guess things. You’ve agreed to be surprised, so from here on out, let’s limit what else I tell you,” said Nate. “But if you really want to do this, the original plan was for you and I to go by the fraternity house this evening. This was to be for a fitting, so you can try on the lingerie. At that point you will know all the details of exactly what you would be doing in the spook alley on Saturday night, two days from now. And you have to promise me that you will back out if you aren’t completely comfortable with everything. I am committed to keeping you safe. And I am more committed than ever to ensure that you have an honest to God chance to back out. So I need you to tell me if you don’t feel safe, or if anything else at all bothers you, okay? I’ve learned that my perception is less than perfect. If we work as a team, maybe I can avoid another screw up, another ‘betrayal’.”  
  
They checked into their motel room. As requested, the room had two queen beds. Dale took the back one close to the bathroom, giving Nate the one by the window. Next they got a quick dinner and then headed for fraternity row. On the drive, Nate remembered one other thing that he had been meaning to discuss with Dale. “Dale, I was meaning to discuss your alias with you before going to the fraternity. I almost didn’t remember because I was sure the plan was canceled. You’ll remember that I came up with Carol on the spur of the moment, and I know you didn’t like it.”  
  
“I got a little used it, but the worst part is that I don’t think it is a name used at all anymore, at least not for our generation,” said Dale.  
  
“Right, I know that. So far, only Daniel knows your real name, but I don’t want anyone else in his fraternity to hear your real name. It is so uncommon. Of course for our official business, the school tours, you’ll have to be Dale. However, we have to use an alias in the fraternity. This is, in a way, our first chance for a reset, name wise. None of the Forest Service people will be here, nobody who already knows you as ‘Carol’,” said Nate.  
  
“But maybe it doesn’t matter because I’m not going to be naked, right?” said Dale.

**The Exhibitionist Next Door - 135: Introducing Maddie**

“Maybe not, but I feel that I must insist. It will be safer. As we both know, there are people going to the U now who are from Prospect. If they hear of a girl named ‘Dale’ they will of course think of you,” said Nate. “There’s no need to have ‘Dale in lingerie in a fraternity spook alley’ rumors or photos floating around school, either.”  
  
“I guess you’re right,” admitted Dale.  
  
“I did some research into the most common girl’s names for babies the year we were born, and I have one in mind that I think sounds nice, much nicer than ‘Carol’ for sure,” said Nate.  
  
“What name is that?” asked Dale.  
  
“Madison,” said Nate. “According to one web site I looked at, it was the fourth most common name that year. And there are several nicknames associated with it. If a common name is the goal, then the common nickname is ‘Maddie’, and it can be spelled several ways, but the spelling wouldn’t matter much. Aliases don’t really get written down. What name might you like?”  
  
“I tried to think about that once, but I don’t think I had any good ideas,” said Dale. “Madison is common, as you say. There are at least two Maddie’s at school, but one of them might be a ‘Madeline’, but I’m not sure,” said Dale.  
  
“I think it would be strange to call you ‘Maddie’, but I expect I would get used to it. I got very good at calling you ‘Carol’. I only messed up a few times, that I noticed. “And if we go with ‘Maddie’, I can call you ‘Mads’, ‘the Madster’ or even ‘Mad-Dog.’”  
  
“Mad-Dog?” said Dale. “You better be kidding! But I guess I am fine with trying to answer to ‘Maddie’. But I can’t promise that I’ll know you are talking to me, at least at first.”  
  
The Phi Gamma Tau house ended up being easy to find. It was a large white house with black shutters and large Greek letters over the main entrance. It was located on the street separating the actual University buildings from the fraternity area of the campus, so it faced a large dorm building across a busy street. The house itself looked as if it had originally been two large homes, in pre-fraternity days. Two houses that had been turned into one by the addition of a center section that joined them.  
  
After finding street parking, Nate and Dale walked up to the front door. Just as they were about to knock, a group of guys came out. They took the opportunity to ask how they might find Daniel Miller.  
  
A tall boy said, “His room is in the pit.”  
  
“The pit?” asked Nate.  
  
“Here, I’ll help you find him,” said the tall boy. After telling his friends that he’d find them in the library later, he introduced himself. “Call me Mick.”  
  
He led them down a flight of stairs saying, “We call the basement ‘The Pit’ for obvious reasons. Daniel’s room is at the end of the hall.”  
  
They knocked on the door, and a moment later, the door opened. It was Daniel. Because his room was small and messy, they decided to head upstairs to the living room to talk.  
  
Dale had expected Daniel to look more like Nate. Since he was a Miller, he had to be from Nate’s father’s side of the family. He was a shorter, more slightly built guy than Nate, and had brown hair, cropped very short. He also had a beard, cropped short. Even though his beard was short, it was probably longer than the hair on his head. Additionally, Daniel had a twinkle in his eye and an impish grin.  
  
After they were in the living room, they made their introductions and explained to Daniel that Dale would go by the name ‘Maddie’. Daniel was fine with that. Nate had informed him in advance that Dale was going to go by an alias to protect her identity.  
  
“Her security, and the protection of her identity is absolutely essential, Daniel,” stressed Nate.  
  
“Okay,” said Daniel. “Understood! But Nate you surprise me. Never a girlfriend and then you show up here with the lovely ‘Maddie’. You must be much more of a lady’s man than I had you figured for.” Nate was glad to hear that he had already switched over to calling Dale, ‘Maddie’.  
  
“Well, the bad news is that we ran into a rough patch in our relationship, and Maddie is no longer my girlfriend. But the good news is that we still made it and Maddie is willing to be a part of the famous Phi Gamma Tau spook alley,” said Nate.  
  
“You mean, Disturbia!” said Daniel. “And I’m sorry to hear about you two. What happened to you guys?”  
  
“Oh, that’s too long of a story,” said Nate.  
  
“Well, if you want one little piece of advice, since you are so adamant about Maddie’s safety, you might want to continue to represent yourselves as a couple,” said Daniel. “I mean, there are a lot of horny guys in this fraternity. Typical college guys, you know, but dress Maddie in the little white nothings that Zack was holding up at lunch today, and strap her to the wheel. Well, that might not go well. I mean, if word spreads that she is unattached. Best to represent her as a married woman, in my opinion.”  
  
“A married woman?” asked Nate.  
  
“Yes, a married woman. Your wife actually. In the Fiji house everyone refers to girlfriends and boyfriends, as wives and husbands,” said Daniel.  
  
“Well, that would have to be up to the young lady,” said Nate. But as he said that, he felt Dale grab his hand. He looked down and saw that she was holding his hand tightly in both of hers. He looked over, and saw her smiling, looking into his eyes. She shrugged, batting her eyes, as if trying to send the signal that she had no choice in the matter.”  
  
“OK, Daniel, girlfriend and boyfr…husband and wife, I mean.” said Dale. “But…wheel? What is the wheel?”  
  
Turning to Nate, Daniel said, “You didn’t tell the wife?” Nate shook his head and Daniel started laughing. His full belly laugh transitioned into an evil laugh, an excellent evil laugh.  
  
Nate said to Dale, “Now you know what Daniel does during the spook alley! I mean, Disturbia! He is in charge of the evil laughter.”  
  
“The Fiji house?” asked Dale.  
  
“Fiji house is the slang term for Phi Gamma Tau,” said Daniel. “I should probably find Zack and Roger. They are in charge of Maddie’s torture. They will be so excited that she is here. They have spent so much time building the wheel, and they have quite a bit of work to do to it after your visit.”  
  
“Nate…torture? Wheel?” said Dale.  
  
“Surprise! Well, you were guessing that there must be a reason that they couldn’t get any girls to agree to this, right?” said Nate. “But you can back out, but if you decide to do this, then your Knight in Shining Armor will be right next to you the entire time, protecting you. That is how it has to be. Actually, I insisted on being your torturer, so I will always be the closest person to you during the spook alley.”  
  
“Torturer?” said Dale.  
  
“Actually, I am not really a torturer, but you will see,” said Nate.  
  
Just then Daniel returned with two other guys. He introduced the tall lanky redhead as ‘Zack’, and the shorter heavyset guy as ‘Roger’. “Zack is a sophomore and the idea man behind this ‘Disturbia’ scene. They are both engineering majors, but Roger is a senior and has been in charge of making sure everything was strong enough to be safe,” said Daniel.  
  
Winking at Dale, Nate said, “Where is the lingerie. Shouldn’t we start with the lingerie?”  
  
“Oh, she wants to try on the lingerie tonight, too?” asked Zack, clearly liking the idea. Nate felt Dale squeeze his hand. He had thought that she’d like being in the lingerie during the wheel fitting, but it was nice to have confirmation.  
  
Zack returned with a small department store bag. “We got the exact sizes you gave us, so they should fit. If not, the store is open tomorrow.”  
  
“Where can I change?” asked Dale, peering into the bag at the small white garments.  
  
“The lady’s head is right around the corner from the front door,” said Daniel, leading the way. “There are multiple bathrooms in the frat, but there is only the one small lady’s restroom, the lady’s head.”  
  
After Dale had gone into the lady’s head, closing the door behind her, Zack and Roger both started doing happy dances, celebrating silently, giving each other high fives and thumbs up signs. Daniel joined in.  
  
Nate could tell how hot they thought she was. Nate was glad that this looked as if it would work out for them. Had he been forced to cancel, these guys would have been dealing with something more akin to severe depression, that he could tell.  
  
A few minutes later, a very pretty, very scantily-clad Dale exited the bathroom, asking, “Is barefoot all right? I don’t really have any shoes with me that might go with lingerie.”  
  
Nobody responded. Nate looked over at the guys. They looked like they were in a state of shock. Roger in particular looked on the verge of cardiac arrest, his mouth hanging open. Nate looked back at Dale. She had figured out that the guys needed a moment to let their eyes adjust, so she was standing there, in one of her runway model poses. Her weight on one foot, the other knee bent and angled out to the side. One hand on a hip, the other arm way up, fingers combing through her hair. Her eyes were angled up to the side.  
  
As he watched, she turned, acting as if she were taking an interest in the large framed photos of fraternity members from long ago.  
  
Nate had seen her do this before. The first time had been on the porch at the fire lookout that first weekend. She was allowing them the opportunity to look, making sure they wouldn’t have to feel self-conscious doing so, by focusing her attention elsewhere.  
  
The little ‘modesty’ skirt was extremely short. Positioned as Dale was wearing it, it barely covered the straps of the thong, but her thong covered pussy peeked out below. And in the back, the bottom third or so of her butt cheeks was visible.

**The Exhibitionist Next Door - 136: Maddie's CG**

The little white bra looked as if it must have a metal ‘U’ shaped part in the very center, creating a deep plunge. The center of this ‘U’ had a little baby blue bow on it made of shiny ribbon. The sides of this ‘U’ slot extended up, supporting the cups in the middle. The tops of the cups crossed her chest horizontally, just above her areolas. It was held up by narrow bra straps connected very far out to the side. It was a very pretty bright white bra with lace areas intermingled with sheer areas. Her areolas were just barely visible.  
  
Just then, Nate heard the front door of the fraternity open. Turning he saw a few guys entering. The first guy to notice Dale, exclaimed, “Holy Shit!”  
  
Dale turned, caught off guard, but Daniel intervened, telling the guys to move along; that they’d get their chance on Saturday. After they were again alone, he said, “Let’s all go down to the pool room. Roger, Zack, you guys need to get on with the wheel fitting.”  
  
Nate looked at Dale. He could tell that she was a little apprehensive, biting her lower lip.  
  
As a group, they went down the stairs to the pit. Rather than turn right and head down the hall toward Daniel’s room, then went straight through double doors into a large room with a pool table in the far end. As Dale entered, she got her first glimpse of what they had been calling ‘the wheel’.  
  
On the floor before her was a large circle made of wood. It was around six feet in diameter and several inches thick. It was painted red and white, in large concentric circles. It was unmistakably a target. “There’s your new home!” announced Daniel. “We hope you like it,” he added. “Zack and Roger have put so much effort into it.”  
  
“My new home?” asked Dale.  
  
“Yes, Nate will be ‘Knife Thrower’, and you will be his assistant, ‘Target Girl’,” said Daniel.  
  
“Target Girl?” said Dale.  
  
“Yes, during Disturbia, this room will showcase ‘The Wheel of Death’,” continued Daniel. “The wheel that you see here will be mounted, almost vertically, on that mechanism against the wall there, and you, in turn, will be mounted spread eagle on the wheel. Zack and Roger will switch it on, and the wheel will turn slowly…around and around. Nate then throws knives at the target, attempting to miss your arms, legs, head and body,” said Daniel. “That’s pretty much it. Simple, huh?”  
  
Everyone just looked at Dale, her eyes were wide as she processed the information, looking at the wheel and the complex mechanism that would support and turn it. Nate loved this look. He knew that Dale loved being pushed out of her comfort zone, that hadn’t changed. The, ‘Oh my God, what have I gotten myself into this time’ emotions were playing out on her face.  
  
Nate thought about the spot that Dale was now in, and how she had more-or-less begged to be here. Even though he had been the one who had backed her into the corner in the sheriff’s office, she really had backed herself into this corner. She craved this feeling, always had.  
  
He was sure that she must know that he wasn’t the only one that could push her outside of her comfort zone, the only one who could ‘abuse’ her in that way. Indeed, she herself had gotten herself trapped on the clubhouse roof.  
  
All her urges were still intact, and surely she would come to realize that she needed him by her side for safety and security. Maybe without him, given the magnitude of the shock, the feelings of betrayal, and her strong will, she would be able to be true to her ‘no nudity’ resolution for a long time. Yet the urges were still there, her craving for risk taking remained.  
  
And even though she liked other types of risk, bungee jumping for instance, her favorite form involved getting naked. He was pretty sure that it would always be. In short, Nate had succeeded in entrapping her in his plan to demonstrate to her that she herself, was in fact, dangerous to herself.  
  
Nate finally broke the silence, “So Maddie, do you want the good news or the bad news first?”  
  
“I haven’t yet heard all the bad news?” she asked.  
  
“OK, then the bad news first,” said Nate. “Disturbia runs for three hours. That is clearly a very long time to be strapped to a spinning wheel, so Zack and Roger have put a lot of effort into figuring out how to make it possible for a girl to be on the wheel for so long. What they came up with is a number of straps and other body supports. You will have handles to hold, but you wouldn’t be able to hold yourself in position for very many turns, so the straps hold you in place.”  
  
“So I am strapped to the target wheel?” asked Dale.  
  
“The Wheel of Death!” corrected Daniel. Zack and Roger were listening to the conversation as it unfolded, not saying anything themselves.  
  
“Yes, Maddie, You will be strapped on securely, for your own safety and hopefully comfort. A side effect will be that you will be immobilized, unable to move, unable to get free, unable to protect yourself. If you agree to do this, only two things will be protecting you from the hundreds of Disturbia visitors, many of them drunk, many of them horny,” said Nate.  
  
“What two things?” asked Dale, her eyes still wide, but now with a hint of terror clearly evident.  
  
“Your outfit, and me,” said Nate. “Oh, and one other thing, so three things. I did not want to be overpowered and witness your gang-rape, so I had one other stipulation that the Fijis were more than happy to agree to. I requested that one of their biggest, strongest guys be stationed in the room at all times to act as an additional bodyguard. They had two suitable volunteers for the position, so in a little bit, you can meet and interview both of them. I thought it would be appropriate for you to do the picking. I want you to be as comfortable as possible, given the circumstances.  
  
“A break or two is possible during the three hour period, but they will have to be short as it will make the line of visitors going through stop and wait, plugging up the whole spook alley. And the breaks will be difficult because Zack and Roger will have to go behind the wheel to unhook all the straps that will hold you in place.”  
  
“So what is the good news?” asked Dale.  
  
“Before we get to that, there is a little more to the bad news,” said Nate. “You will be blindfolded.”  
  
“Blindfolded?” asked Dale.  
  
“Yes, target girls are usually blindfolded. It makes them look more vulnerable, but it might also protect them. If they were to jerk to avoid a knife, then they might get stabbed. The advantage is that the blindfold will hide your face, making it very unlikely that you will be recognized. I’ve also stipulated that no photography be allowed in the room. It is important to me that you not be recognized and that we prevent photography, very important. The bouncer, who you will pick yourself, will be in charge of enforcing the ‘no photography’ rule, among other things,” said Nate.  
  
“But Nate, blindfolded and spinning for three whole hours?”  
  
“Oh don’t worry. Zack and Roger have constructed a blindfold from white cloth that matches the lingerie, a big blindfold, covering from the top of your forehead down to the tip of your nose, but because of the material, it will allow you to see,” said Nate.  
  
Zack spoke, “Yes, you’ll look blindfolded, but you will be able to watch what is going on in the room. And Roger and I thought the blindfold would also be good because it will hold your hair in place. Without it, your hair might sweep the floor with every rotation.”  
  
“Wow,” said Dale, everything starting to sink it. “If there really is some good news, then now might be a good time.”  
  
Nate smiled, “OK, the good news. I will have knives, and Zack and Roger will add some knives to the board for decoration, but no knives will actually be thrown. I think you’ll have enough to worry about without actually fearing for your life.”  
  
“I think, I’ve finally figured out why you guys had trouble finding a girl to be a part of this scene,” said Dale, turning to Zack and Roger.  
  
Zack, clearly the more gregarious of the pair answered, “Yes, at first we had very high standards and talked to only the most attractive girls. Originally we wanted a stacked chick because all the guys in the house were picturing how fun it would be to watch the affect that shifting gravity would have on a well-endowed lady. Eventually, we did widen the search a bit, but not that much. Without an attractive target girl, the enthusiasm seemed to dissipate.”  
  
“Kristi seemed like we might talk her into it, but she was sure she’d end up puking,” said Daniel.  
  
“I thought you’d be able to handle going upside down relatedly, D…Maddie,” said Nate, almost messing up on the name. Fortunately, it looked like neither Zack nor Roger had noticed. He continued, “Because I’ve seen you do cartwheel after cartwheel. To me, this looks kind of similar.”  
  
“But three hours?” said Dale.  
  
“Well, you can back out, or quit part way through if it is not going well. These guys don’t want you to suffer. They’ve put a lot of effort into figuring out how to make the wheel as comfortable as possible,” said Nate.  
  
Nate saw Dale put on a brave face, asking, “So, okay, what next guys?”  
  
Turning to face the wheel on the floor, Zack said, “Well first, we need to have you lie down in position. We need to get your CG right in the center of the wheel.”  
  
After a second of thought, Dale asked, “So what is a CG? Is that a college word for pussy?”  
  
Nate looked at Zack, who was turning bright red. He knew that Dale was able to use words like ‘pussy’ in mixed company, but he could tell that all the guys were knocked back on their heels a bit due to hearing the word come out of a girl’s mouth. Until uttering that single word, she had been behaving like the articulate, prim and proper girl that most people knew her to be.  
  
Finally, Zack responded, “No, actually it’s an engineering term. CG stands for Center of Gravity.”

**The Exhibitionist Next Door - 137: The Wheel**

Roger continued the explanation, “We need the wheel to be balanced….just like they balance tires at a tire shop. We placed a board, crossways, under the wheel so that it will rock to tell us which way the weight needs to shift to get it to balance, top to bottom. Side to side should not be an issue.”  
  
“Oh, sorry,” said Dale. “I was simply realizing which part of my body was going to be on top of the bullseye, and then you said ‘we need your CG in the center of the wheel’ and I thought…OK, I’m going to stop talking now.”  
  
Nate looked at Dale and noticed that her face had turned a bright shade of red. He was the only one in the bunch without a red face, and the thought of that made him laugh. A second later, they were all laughing.  
  
They helped Dale get positioned on the board, face up and spread eagle. She had to shift up and down just a little until they got her CG in the middle, such that the wheel balanced on the board beneath. Nate noticed that her center of gravity ended up being just above her pussy, right at the little bow on her thong that he could see peeking through the sheer modesty skirt.  
  
They were now ready to draw around her, so that Zack and Roger would know where all the attachment points needed to be added.  
  
Nate found himself in an enviable position near her feet, not entirely by chance, looking up between her legs. He found himself appreciating the little white thong. It was sheer and pulled tight across her slit, showing a deep camel toe that left very little to the imagination. Further down, between her legs, the material tapered very quickly to the thong back. This meant that right between her upper thighs, there wasn’t quite enough material to span from one leg to the other.  
  
There , at the top of her legs, he could see where her thighs ended, the point where the skin turned, transitioning into the skin that was essentially her outer labia. In this between the legs area, this little white thong was still covering her slit, but with very little margin for error. It was even narrower than the imaginary thong, and it had been the tiniest, most narrow thong he could envision. In that instant, the imaginary thong got a wee a bit smaller.  
  
“You guys sure picked the right guy to send to the lingerie store, whoever that was,” said Nate. “This little white thong just barely covers Maddie’s CG…I mean her bullseye.”  
  
“Nate!” exclaimed Dale, quickly bringing her legs together and her hands down to cover her crotch.  
  
She then attempted to pull the skirt down to help hide her intimate details from all the male eyes. Nate was pretty sure that she was just doing it to conform to society’s expectations of how girls were supposed to behave under such conditions.  
  
“So who did the shopping?” asked Nate.  
  
“Well, Zack and I both went to the store,” said Roger, “But he pretty much picked the outfit.”  
  
“Well done, gentlemen!” said Nate, giving them the two thumbs up sign.  
  
“Nate!” said Dale again, actually blushing.  
  
“Now wifey, back in position,” said Nate. “I know I shouldn’t have said anything. But these guys need to get this board marked.”  
  
Dale finally relaxed, going into the spread eagle position. As she did so, she could feel the board rock as it again started to balance.  
  
Nate continued, “So Zack and Roger, I need you to do something for me. Daniel tells me that in the Fiji house you guys call girlfriends ‘wives’. I want everyone in the Fiji house to know that Maddie is my wife, and that there are very strict ‘look but don’t touch’ rules in place. She and I are OK with this skimpy outfit, but if someone gets out of line with their hands, her evening here on Saturday comes to an immediate end. Got that?”  
  
Both Zack and Roger agreed to spread the word.  
  
Dale smiled, she was so pleased to see Nate, the guy that she cared for so deeply – maybe even the guy that she loved – even though she certainly wouldn’t admit that – not to him, not to herself – taking charge and looking out for her.  
  
Part of the reason that Nate brought this up with Zack and Roger was that fraternity members continued to wander into the pool room. Each time Daniel went and talked with them, asking them to leave. They usually seemed reluctant to do so. The scantily clad girl lying spread eagle on the wooden target on the floor was much more interesting than any of the other Disturbia preparations taking place in other rooms in the fraternity.  
  
Once she was in position, Roger gave her some dowels to hold. She was supposed to position them in a location where she wanted the handles mounted. Once that position was selected and marked, they slid boards up against her feet and marked their location. They would be mounted permanently there so she could stand against them when in an upright position.  
  
At that point they wanted a line drawn in pencil around her entire body. Nate had to do that as only the husband had touching privileges. Dale held very still, and Nate held the long pencil that they had brought with them for this purpose vertically. He slid it up one leg from her foot, along her upper thigh, and across her panty covered pussy, to the top of the other thigh. Dale stifled a giggle as she felt the pencil slide across from one thigh to the other. Nate had to remind her to hold still as he did it again. Nate was trying his best to make it ticklish. ‘Never any reason to rush the fun part,’ he thought.  
  
He had noticed that a damp spot had formed in the center of the thong. He didn’t mention it, but he had made a point of sliding the pencil shaft across that very spot as he traced her outline. He had made sure to apply a little pressure as the pencil crossed her pussy lips. That is what had caused her to giggle, and why he had taken the liberty of repeating the maneuver. He thought that he’d probably get away with such things under the circumstances. Dale would want to maintain their status as a ‘married’ couple.  
  
Nate knew he was walking a fine line. He wanted to careful enough to not get himself in even more trouble, yet he wanted to not get carried away with that. Part of their relationship had always been the fun that they had had together. He wanted to keep things fun between them. Becoming a boring neighbor seemed as if it might be the nail that would seal him in his coffin.  
  
As he traced along her torso, he actually tickled her ribcage with his other hand, but he did so carefully so the guys wouldn’t see. She did her best to hold position, whispering, “I’ll get you later for this, hubby!”  
  
Once the outline was complete, Zack and Roger had Nate make measurements in a few locations where the straps would be located. They had a measuring tape from a fabric store for this purpose. So Nate took measurements up and over her upper arm, up and over her one of her thighs, and up and over her ankle near her heel. In these areas, they would cut slots in the board through which straps would pass.  
  
At that point, Zack and Roger had what they needed, and went right to work planning how to accomplish the remaining tasks to ready the wheel for Saturday night.  
  
“Ok, Maddie,” said Daniel, “Time to pick a bouncer. Nate ordered up one of our biggest, toughest guys to help him keep you safe while you are strapped defenseless to the wheel. So we have two guys who would be excellent at that. I told Nate that we should just flip a coin, but he wanted you to pick your own bodyguard. So we’ve set this up so that you can interview each of them to make your decision. Before we do that, Maddie, would you like to get dressed?”  
  
Before Dale could answer, Nate interjected, “I’d prefer that she stay in the lingerie, Daniel. That will allow her to best determine who she feels she can trust, based on how they behave around her when she is nearly naked. Will that be fine, Maddie?”  
  
“Yes, okay,” said Dale.  
  
Sometimes it was maddening to her how well Nate could predict what she would want to do. This time, however, it was nice that he had come up with a logical reason for her to stay in just the lingerie. Had it not been for him, she would have gotten dressed. She would have been unwilling to let Daniel know her preference.  
  
“Okay,” said Daniel, “Let’s go upstairs. You can wait in the Chapter room, and I’ll send the guys in one at a time. Their names are TJ and Nawlins.”  
  
“Nawlins?” asked Dale.  
  
“That’s not his real name, that’s just what we call him,” said Daniel, “He’s from New Orleans, but the closest he can come to pronouncing it correctly is ‘Nawlins’, so that is what we call him.”  
  
“Are you OK with being alone with these guys, Maddie?” asked Nate.  
  
“Sure, I’ll be fine,” said Dale, “If you are just outside the door, that is.”  
  
“I’m not going anywhere,” said Nate.  
  
Dale looked around the small room. It was furnished in an antique style and had two leather couches, and a number of dark wood bookcases holding very old looking books. The walls were hung with old photographs, and official looking documents. She decided that one of the documents, must be the fraternity’s charter, hence the name ‘Charter Room’.  
  
It felt funny waiting to meet a big guy dressed only in skimpy white lingerie. She liked it, but she was trying to suppress those thoughts. There was a knock, and then a large black man entered, closing the door behind him.  
  
Nate waited alone in the hall. Daniel had gone to find TJ. Dale talked to Nawlins for about five minutes, after which he came out and TJ went in.  
  
About five minutes later, Dale and TJ came out together. Daniel asked, “So Maddie, have you decided? Which one of these excellent gentlemen will have the honor of protecting you on Saturday night?”  
  
“Well, Daniel,” said Dale, “I’d feel safe with either of them. However, the choice is difficult. I’ve decided on the only truly fair method of reaching a decision. Both guys tell me that they are excellent pool players. So I’ve decided to settle this with a game of eight-ball, winner takes all.”

**The Exhibitionist Next Door - 138: Bedtime**

TJ and Nawlins bumped fists, and headed down to the pit to play pool. Dale smiled at Nate as they walked together, following everyone else downstairs. As Nate walked down the stairs next to her, a light went off in his brain. By giving Dale the choice, something he had felt good about, he had put her on the spot.  
  
Had she made a choice, one of the guys would be happy, but the other might have always felt slighted by the pretty little teen in the white lingerie. Dale had found the win-win in a difficult situation. She was indeed an impressively astute young lady! Everyone would end up feeling good about the outcome, even though there would indeed be a loser.  
  
Nate had a good time watching the intense pool match. Dale flitted around the table, flirting with each guy in turn, cheering for whoever’s turn it happened to be, working diligently to coax the best game possible out of each one of them, her cheerleader savvy coming in handy.  
  
Nate could tell that both guys were having fun, and he didn’t think he’d ever seen two guys try harder to win a game of pool.  
  
Nate thought he’d seen every possible Dale, yet this was a new one. Back in Prospect, Dale couldn’t or didn’t flirt, yet here she was flirting shamelessly. She kept her behavior within a narrow range, always on the well-behaved, conservative side of the spectrum. It was her level of dress, not her behavior, that pushed the display across the provocative line. He could tell how much the guys were enjoying her.  
  
She apparently felt safe in this situation, but she was dressed in the skimpiest of borderline see-through undies. The bra fit perfectly, which meant that there wasn’t much fabric to it; given her modest size, it simply wasn’t required. And had it not been for the little skirt, the amount of covering below her navel would have amounted to quite a bit less fabric than what she had covering a single tit.  
  
Nate enjoyed watching her flirt, but it was with a little bit of envy that he realized that she had never flirted with him. Sure they had had their share of fun, but never actual flirting.  
  
In the end, Nawlins sank the eight-ball for the win. As Nate watched, Dale gave each contestant a ‘victory’ kiss that brought back memories. She gripped both of their hands in hers, and then pulled herself up toward their faces, planting a kiss on each guy’s lips. It was exceedingly friendly, yet each guy’s hands were kept out of action. Long ago, he himself had received a similar kiss.  
  
He had spent a long time wondering if it was merely a coincidence that his hands had been held in that manner. Watching her do it now left him with no doubt that she was doing it on purpose to be in control of all contact. After that one time, she had never again kissed him in that way. That, in and of itself, seemed to be the proof. He found himself wondering if Jason had received similar kisses, but he forced those thoughts out of his head.  
  
He wondered why he had always given so much thought to Dale, and this particular method of hers, used just for kissing. And he found himself thinking about how these guys, like the guys in the lookout, had received Dale kisses on the lips so soon after meeting her. He himself, even though he had rescued her, had to wait a long time for a kiss on the lips.  
  
He tried to force the jealous thoughts out of his head. For some reason showing her nude body to others didn’t bring out the jealous thoughts. Could that be because that was something that he himself was addicted to…showing her off? Part of his own kink? Others being intimate with Dale, kissing her, for example, that was entirely different, he realized.  
  
By the time Dale finally got dressed, she had spent nearly two hours in nothing but lingerie. As they were preparing to leave, Daniel invited them to stay for study break. He explained, telling them how at 10 pm each school night the fraternity set out dessert in the fraternity dining room.  
  
Fraternity brothers and typically a few friends and girlfriends would congregate there for a little while to socialize. Those studying in their rooms would come out, and those who were in the library would typically return to the house to take part.  
  
Nate and Dale accepted the invitation, and each had a piece of cake with vanilla ice cream. They spent the next half hour meeting and getting to know people. Quite a few people had seen ‘Maddie’ at a distance before Daniel had asked them to move along, so she constantly had a ring of guys around her. In comparison, few people were very interested in talking to Nate. He was fine with that. Dale had always been much more popular than he had ever been, and this was a group of guys, many of which had seen her in the skimpiest of outfits.  
  
He was very glad that everyone was being made fully aware that ‘Maddie’ was his ‘wife’ and therefore completely off limits. What he had asked Zack and Roger to take care of for him in that regard was now completely unnecessary.  
  
He was, however, very glad that they were finally able to get out of there and head back to the motel.  
  
On the short drive to the motel, Dale teased him about how quickly he had gone from having a ‘neighbor named Dale’ to having a ‘wife named Maddie’. They both had a good laugh thinking about that.  
  
Back in their motel room, Dale headed into the restroom. Nate pulled out his information about the schools and started looking it over in preparation for the next morning. After a while, he realized that Dale had been in the bathroom for a very long time. She had been typically quick, having no clothes to change out of or into, but even that wouldn’t account for how long she had been in there.  
  
Finally, he knocked and inquired, “Dale, are you alright? You’ve been in there a long time.”  
  
“Oh, sorry,” she said. “You probably need to use the restroom.”  
  
“It’s not that. I was just getting worried,” said Nate.  
  
“I’m just soaking my nips. Everything’s fine,” she said.  
  
“Dale, that can’t be comfortable, doing that in there. Why don’t you do that lying in bed, like you usually do?” said Nate.  
  
“That was then, this is now,” she said.  
  
Nate went back to his bed. He didn’t think she could have said that in a more insensitive way. That really stung. He had been imagining that they had had a good day, possibly the start of patching things up. Indeed she had been so much like the old Dale at the Fiji house, holding his hand, introducing herself as his wife, essentially acting every bit as a girlfriend might. But it had all apparently been just for show.  
  
He was lying on the bed, looking at a map of Watson College when he heard the bathroom door open. He was just starting to look up when he felt something hit the side of his head.  
  
He looked up at Dale. She was standing there in a knee-length burgundy nightgown, glaring at him. “So, what kind of a weekend were you planning on, Buster?” she asked.  
  
Nate looked over onto his bed and saw what she had thrown, a small box of condoms.  
  
“Those were in my toiletries case,” said Nate. “What were you doing looking in there?”  
  
“I forgot my toothpaste, and was looking to borrow some, when look what I happened to find!” said Dale. “A dozen, huh?”  
  
“I bought them a few trips ago. It’s no big deal,” said Nate.  
  
“Were they for use with me, or with college girls?” said Dale sarcastically. “I guess there are enough to go around, right?”  
  
“Dale, it’s no big deal. We had the same health classes. Guys, and girls, are supposed to have these on hand, because what did they teach us? That the passion of the moment can cloud our good judgement, right?” said Nate.  
  
“So that’s it! Passion what you were hoping for? Hoping that somehow my ‘adrenalin’ would get pumping and…”  
  
He interrupted her. “Dale, seriously…what has gotten into you? You know I love you. You know I’m not going to take advantage of you. You know that I want to make love to you…someday. That’s no secret. But you also know that I will only let that happen if the situation is perfect, perfect for both of us. The condoms are simply me being prepared, so that if and when it happens, everything can be perfect. Now put them back,” he said, throwing that box back at her.  
  
The box landed on the counter next to her. She picked it up and threw it into the wastebasket, still obviously in a huff. She climbed into her bed, and turned facing away from him.  
  
Nate took his turn in the bathroom. When he came out, all the lights were off, so he climbed into bed. They did exchange a few words, but they were limited to when they would get up in the morning. The final thing that Nate said was, “Good night, Dale. I do love you.”  
  
She responded simply, “Good night, Nate.”  
  
A little while later, he noticed that her breathing pattern indicated that she was asleep. It hadn’t been that bad of a day, but it sure had ended on a down note, that much was obvious.  
  
Sometime in the middle of the night, Nate woke up. He wasn’t sure why he had woken up, but then he realized that Dale was in bed with him. She was asleep, lying on her side, facing away. He didn’t want to wake her, but he did want to be close to her. As carefully and as slowly as he could manage, he rolled next to her in spoon positon.  
  
His skin came into contact with hers and he realized that she was nude. He wondered why she had climbed into bed with him, but he didn’t really care. It just felt so wonderful to be close. He didn’t want to go back to sleep; he wanted to remain awake and enjoy the sensations, the wonderful things that being so close were doing to his soul.